A STUDY OF THE SOUTHERN CHRISTIAN LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE AND THE RISE AND FALL OF THE NONVIOLENT CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT

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A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENT FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY AT THE UNIVERSITY OF KEELE

1977

ABSTRACT

Despite its lack of membership and vague organizational structure, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference was the most effective of the various groups which composed the Southern civil rights movement: the SCLC's campaigns in Birmingham and Selma furnished the impetus for the passage of both the 1964 Civil Rights Act and the 1965 Voting Rights Act. In both campaigns the SCLC extricated the civil rights movement from a tactical impasse, provided it with fresh momentum, and allied it with new sources of white support.

The effectiveness of the SCLC had a number of causes. Almost entirely made up of ministers, the Conference was uniquely equipped to draw upon the spiritual and material resources of the black church; its religious roots also gave immense popularity and personal authority to Martin Luther King, Jr., and accorded the tactics of nonviolent direct action an unassailable moral legitimacy. In its application of nonviolent direct action the SCLC exhibited a tactical skill and political sophistication which enabled it to defeat the forces of white supremacy by exposing their violence to the hostile glare of national and international publicity. Aware that a reform of the South required the assent of the white majority, the SCLC solved the dilemma of black powerlessness by by-passing the established political and judicial

institutions, and appealing directly to Northern public opinion. Possessed of a keen sense of political realism, King and his lieutenants maintained a subtle balance between pressure and persuasion in their use of nonviolent direct action.

The SCLC failed to repeat its success in the North because, its demands bitterly opposed by the white majority, it could no longer command significant white support; in Chicago, the federal government was no longer a sympathetic ally. In addition, urban riots, the emergence of Black Power and the war in Vietnam exacerbated both the "white backlash" and the internal disarray of the civil rights movement. After the failure of the Chicago campaign, the principal achievements of the SCLC were the strengthening of the peace movement, the development of the idea of "Poor People's Power" and the consolidation of the gains won in the South.

The bankruptcy of black separatism, and the steady growth of integration and black political power in the South, indicate that the accomplishment of the SCLC and the nonviolent civil rights movement should not be lightly dismissed.

PREFACE

This study has four aims: to re-evaluate the career of Martin Luther King, Jr.; to assess the contribution of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference to the civil rights movement; and to weigh the achievements, and account for the failures, of the civil rights movement as a whole.

It is not the purpose of this study to make extravagant claims on behalf of Martin Luther King: Watts, Newark and Detroit--and the election of Richard Nixon--have long since illuminated the limitations of his philosophy and technique of social change. Before his death, King observed that his Dream was turning into a nightmare; after his death, that nightmare cast a dark shadow over his historical reputation.

It is, nevertheless, paradoxical that although professional historians and black radicals have tended to downgrade King's achievements, his position among ordinary blacks as a popular hero, legend and inspirational symbol has become solidly entrenched. And--a consequence of the increasing political influence of Southern blacks--King is now being accorded a degree of symbolic recognition by whites that no other black historical figure has enjoyed.

The first and most influential assessments of Martin Luther King appeared at a time when, under the repressive Nixon regime, it appeared that the civil

rights movement accomplished very little, and that the United States was entering a period of quasi-fascism. King, they agreed, had placed too much faith in liberal democracy, underestimated the oppressiveness of American society, and proposed strategies and solutions that were woefully lacking in radicalism.

The passage of time dictates a revision of this viewpoint. Although the last decade has seen no important new victories by blacks, the ground won by the civil rights movement has been held and extended. At the same time, the strategies of violence and separatism advocated by many of King's critics have shown themselves to be misguided and ineffective. From this vantage point, it is possible to realize that the religious, idealistic and "moderate" elements in King's thought were counterbalanced by a robust realism and radicalism.

The second theme of this study is the Southern Christian Leadership Conference as an organization. Although the SCLC was the organizational extension of a single man, it was also more than that. King's lieutenants were gifted and forceful personalities, and their specific, individual contributions merit study. The importance of the SCLC cannot, however, be understood solely in organizational terms. Its ability to draw upon the spiritual and material resources of the black church, its capacity to attract sympathetic

publicity and white support, and the skill and political acuity with which it applied the tactics of nonviolent direct action gave the SCLC a unique influence in the civil rights movement, moulding its basic direction, and imparting to it a clear set of philosophical assumptions, strategic objectives and tactical methods. Of all the civil organizations, the SCLC most precisely embodied the spirit of the nonviolent movement.

The major campaigns of the SCLC have already been described in detail elsewhere. The accounts of them given here attempt to cover new ground by highlighting their intricate tactics, their overall strategy, and their exact impact on the civil rights movement. Accounts of the SCLC's lesser known campaigns are included to illustrate the popular roots of the civil rights movement, to emphasize the importance of local circumstances and local leaders, and to put the larger campaigns in their proper perspective. Only by studying both types of campaigns is it possible to dispel the myth that the SCLC's victories were "easy." The civil rights movement was not pushing against an open door: it had to batter that door down.

A question which haunts the history of the civil rights movement is: why did SNCC and CORE repudiate King's leadership? Why did the movement collapse so rapidly and completely after 1965? Others have argued,

convincingly, that the civil rights movement was ill-equipped for the task of political organization that the Voting Rights Act demanded, and that, being a Southern movement, it had neither the resources, the tactics nor the programmes to cope with the problems of racism in the North.

Although all these internal factors are carefully considered, a central assertion of this thesis is that the civil rights movement, rather than dying by its own hand, was the casualty of a white racism it could not overcome. Moreover, in common with many other American social movements, the civil rights movement tended to substitue idealism for ideology, flaring brilliantly for a short period, only to burn itself out when its task was only half completed.

Because he was the individual most closely identified with the triumphs of the movement, it was inevitable that King should be blamed for its failures. Yet the defeats which followed Selma did not, as SNCC claimed, invalidate that which the civil rights movement had achieved, nor the means by which it had been achieved. The failure of SNCC's alternative strategy of Black Power indicated that no strategy, violent or nonviolent, interracial or separatist, existed which could persuade or pressure the white majority to accord blacks <u>de facto</u> equality.

That the civil rights movement failed to attain goals that would have entailed basic alterations in the structure and ideology of the American political economy is hardly surprising. What is more remarkable is that the movement, guided by King and the SCLC, evolved a philosophy, strategy and method of social change which accomplished in a decade that for which blacks in the South had been unsuccessfully struggling for the better part of a century. The abolition of de jure segregation, the ending of routine white violence against blacks, access to the political system, and the elimination of racist demagoguery: this collective achievement can only be deemed a failure if set against the SCLC's higher goal "To Save the Soul of America."

In addition to a multitude of secondary works, the reports of the Southern Regional Council and the observations of the press, this work is based upon primary sources relating to Martin Luther King, the SCLC, SNCC, and other civil rights organizations. It could not have been written without the help of many institutions and individuals. Ms. Minnie Clayton of the Martin Luther King, Jr., Memorial Library was of great assistance, as were Ms. Janet Smith of the Southern Regional Council, and the staffs of Boston University's Mugar Library and Dillard University's Amistad Collection. Little of this research would have been carried out had not Dr. Charles Crowe

invited me to spend a year at the University of Georgia, where he is a Professor of History. Dr. Crowe, a veteran of the civil rights movement, also taught me much about the character of racism in the United States. I would also like to express my gratitude to Dr. Duncan Macleod, of St. Catherine's College, Oxford, who gave me the opportunity to expose my ideas to public criticism; and to Dr. Mary Ellison, my thesis supervisor at the University of Keele, who gave me three years of friendship and encouragement. Finally, Pat Benard made the completion of this thesis much less tedious than it would otherwise have been.

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CHAPTER I

THE ORIGINS OF THE SOUTHERN CHRISTIAN LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE AND THE NONVIOLENT CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT

In 1966, Martin Luther King, Jr. recalled, with a genuine sense of awe, the decade-old event that many deemed the birth of the civil rights movement:

> One day . . . a lady by the name of Rosa Parks decided that she wasn't going to take it any longer. She stayed on a bus seat. . . . It was the beginning of a movement where fifty thousand black men and women refused--absolutely--to ride the city buses. And we walked together for three hundred and eighty-one days. . . . We stuck together. We sent out the call; no Negro rode the buses. It was one of the most amazing things I've ever seen in my life. 1

Although King liked to discern the hand of God in the Montgomery bus boycott, he admitted that it had been "the culmination of a slowly developing process."[2] During the previous two decades, the legal and economic foundations of white supremacy had been subject to a gradual erosion. The outlawing of the white primary in 1944 had paved the way for the re-emergence of a black electorate in the South, while the 1954 Brown decision of the Supreme Court had struck at the heart of de jure segregation. After the Second World War, the spirit of resistance among Southern blacks perceptibly quickened, as testified to by the rapid expansion of the NAACP--and the violent reactions of Southern whites.[3] In the Deep South, the struggle for racial equality took on the aspect of a war, as local NAACP leaders were bombed, assassinated, or driven out.[4] As yet,

however, the nascent civil rights movement was characterized by fragmented and scattered leadership, lack of Northern support, and an absence of strong community involvement. The Montgomery bus boycott--not an unusual event in itself--gave the movement a focus, an inspirational symbol, a practical technique of social action, and a new source of leadership.

I. THE HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE MONTGOMERY BUS BOYCOTT

The Maintenance of Black Unity

"There is an amazing lack of fear on the part of the Negro community," wrote King in September 1956. "They are determined never to return to jim crow buses."[5] From the first day of the boycott to the last, an almost unanimous unity infused Montgomery's black community, despite economic coercion, physical and psychological harassment, legal guerilla warfare, bombings, and mass arrests.

The achievement of unity was all the more surprising in view of the passivity and factionalism that had afflicted Montgomery's black population before the protest. "If you had asked me the day before our protest began," admitted King in 1957, "whether any action could or would have been taken by the Negroes, I'd have said no."[6] Such a conclusion would not have been unduly pessimistic. "An appalling lack of unity" existed within the black leadership, which was divided into half a dozen civic and political organizations, "each at loggerheads with the other."[7] An

attempt to coordinate these groups had only recently foundered on the shoals of community apathy. Apathy, in fact, was a second principal barrier to effective black action. It extended through every social class, and was attributable less to fear of white reprisal than to the "corroding sense of inferiority" caused by segregation. This state of affairs, wrote King "had almost persuaded me that no lasting social reform could ever be achieved in Montgomery."[8] But by April 1956, five months into the boycott, King proudly claimed that "We now know that we can stick together."[9]

Although blacks accounted for 70 per cent of those who travelled on Montgomery's buses, they included only a small proportion of the black middle-class, most of whom owned at least one car.[10] The boycott, however, became a symbolic issue that cut across class lines, involving the whole community. "The Negro leaders," wrote Norman Walton in 1957, "have finally caught up with the masses."[11] The actual organization of the boycott reinforced this feeling of unity. The task of providing an alternative transport system brought the black middle-class into direct contact with their less well-off brothers.[12] Blacks of all classes rode in the cars provided by the pool, regardless of class, education or status. The boycott was conducted according to a strategy of total community involvement; it was militantly egalitarian in spirit.

The involvement of the black church

Black ministers were in the forefront of the Montgomery protest. This was remarkable. King's predecessor at Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, the Rev. Vernon Johns, had, for years, lashed out against racial injustice, and tried to "rock the complacency of his refined, middle-class congregation."[13] In 1953, Johns had openly defied the city's bus segregation law, challenging others to do likewise, but he had met with no response from his black fellow-passengers.[14] His congregation was glad to see him go. Johns was altogether atypical of Montgomery's black clergymen, most of whom, according to King, "remained aloof from the area of social responsibility," preaching an other-wordly gospel that conformed to Marx's description of religion as "an opiate of the people."[15]

Martin Luther King represented a new type of black clergyman. Highly-educated and racially-conscious, King was already convinced that it was the duty of a minister to concern himself with the social, political and economic problems of his congregation, as well as those of the surrounding community.[16] Immediately after assuming his pastorate in Montgomery, he had established a Social and Political Action Committee, which supported the NAACP, promoted community awareness of social issues and, most important of all, stimulated voter registration.[17]

The Montgomery Improvement Association was largely run and led by black ministers. They made up four of its

ten original officers, and almost half of its executive board.[18] "Our church is becoming militant," wrote King in April 1956, and was finally providing the driving-force behind a movement for social change.[19] Because the church was the primary social institution in the black community, and because many of its ministers were financially independent of the white community, this clerical leadership proved highly effective. "From the beginning," wrote Lerone Bennett, "the Montgomery movement assumed a missionary character," infusing its participants with courage, self-confidence and optimism.[20] The weekly mass meetings of the MIA not only harnessed the religious fervour of Montgomery's blacks to the boycott, but also provided the movement with an essentially democractic forum, in which "the PhD's and the no 'D's' were bound together in a common venture." [21]

Montgomery's example of ministerial leadership was emulated in numerous other Southern cities, and it eventually became the dominant type of leadership in the civil rights movement. Black ministers would be in the vanguard of the struggle for social justice during the next decade. The Montgomery boycott demonstrated that "the Negro religious tradition contained enormous reservoirs of psychic and social strength." [22] And the founding of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference was an attempt to maximize that strength by giving it structure, leadership, and direction.

The psychological gains of Montgomery

Six years after the Montgomery protest, black author Louis Lomax wondered how "such a deep-rooted movement had resulted in nothing more than the integration of the buses."[23] Such a relatively insignificant achievement did nothing to alter the appalling conditions of life in which the majority of the city's blacks were forced to live. Moreover, Montgomery's schools and public accommodations remained segregated until the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act.[24]

Montgomery's true significance was symbolic. It demonstrated that Southern blacks could successfully stand up against racial injustice. It improved the self image, and increased the self-respect and self-confidence of blacks across the nation. The MIA had conducted the boycott with an intelligence and tactical skill that was in sharp contrast to the stupidity and heavy-handed brutality displayed by the city's white leaders. Time and time again, the latter were outmanoeuvred by the leaders of the movement. The city's obstinate refusal to accede to the movement's modest request for fair treatment led the MIA to escalate its demands. Originally seeking merely "the right, under segregation, to seat ourselves from the rear forward on a first come, first served basis," the city's attitude left the MIA no alternative but to challenge the legality of Montgomery's bus segregation law in the federal courts.[25] As the Rev. Thomas B. Thrasher

pointed out at the time, this was "a far broader challenge than had been posed by the boycott itself," but the city had stupidly convicted Rosa Parks for violating the bus segregation law, thereby exposing that statute to attack in the federal courts.[26] Moreover, in its own legal proceedings, the city exhibited a tactical ineptitude. It delayed, for example, enjoining the MIA's car pool until the legal struggle, thanks to the Supreme Court, was all but over.[27] When it attempted to freeze the MIA's assets, the movement simply deposited its funds in banks located outside Alabama. "At every turn," observed Time, "King outgeneraled Montgomery's white officials."[28]

The city's efforts to divide and intimidate the black community also backfired. "Because the Mayor and city authorities cannot admit to themselves that we have changed," King wrote in April 1956, "every move they have made had inadvertently increased the protest and united the Negro community." The "get-tough" policy, adopted by the city at the end of January 1956, failed to break the movement's resolve, and the harassment and arrest of MIA leaders merely increased their stature by demonstrating their courage, and illustrating that they would not "sell-out" their followers.[29] Similarly, the arrest of ninety-three people, including twenty-four ministers, was turned into a psychological victory for the movement. "Montgomery's hymn-singing Negro bus-boycotters last night vowed by thundering, stamping applause that the indictment

of 115 boycott leaders would not halt their movement," wrote the Montgomery Advertiser.[30] Rather than await their being taken into custody, many of those indicted voluntarily surrendered to the authorities.[31] "A once fear-ridden people had been transformed," wrote King. "Those who had previously trembled before the law were now proud to be arrested for the cause of freedom."[32]

It was the defiance and fearlessness exhibited by Montgomery's black population, its refusal to be divided, cowed, or intimidated, that most clearly defined the significance of the bus boycott. It was a psychological victory of large dimensions. Many observers wrote about the emergence of a "New Negro" in Montgomery, using the metaphor of a transition from adolescence to adulthood. "We now know that the Southern Negro has come of age," wrote Martin Luther King.[33] The apathy and submissive acquiescence that had previously characterized Montgomery's blacks were dispelled. No longer would they quietly accept the daily injustices and humiliations inflicted by segregation; "they would never again be the old, subservient, fearful appeasers."[34]

The failure of Montgomery's white leaders to recognize this inner transformation accounted for the seeming stupidity of their tactics. Such tactics had always worked in the past, but "something happened to the Negro" to diminish their effectiveness.[35] As a professor at Alabama State College put it: "This complicated matters

for the white man; he knew how to deal with the boy but could not handle the man."[36] The illustration, moreover, that white brutality increased black unity had a profound impact upon the future tactics of the civil rights movement. Montgomery's lesson was not lost upon King and other black leaders: white violence cemented solidarity in the black community and discredited its perpetrators. Thus the SCLC deemed it more advantageous to confront the coarse brutality of a Bull Connor or a Jim Clark than face the more refined repression of a Laurie Pritchett or a Mayor Daley.

Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Theory of Nonviolent Resistance

A few months after the beginning of the protest, it had become clear that the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., was a man of unusual courage, eloquence and spiritual depth. His courage had been demonstrated on numerous occasions. Harassed and arrested by the police, indicted by the city authorities, subjected to a stream of abusive and threatening telephone calls, and the victim of a bomb attack, King's proclaimed willingness to die on behalf of the protest inspired the black community.[37] He was a model of charismatic leadership; as Time observed, "Martin Luther King, Jr. is, in fact, what many a Negro . . . would like to be."[38]

But his contribution was far greater than this: King interpreted the Montgomery protest in terms that gave

it a universal application. The boycott, he claimed, was an example of nonviolent resistance, a method of social change which, by means of Christian love, sought not only to end oppression, but also to bring about reconciliation, redemption of the oppressor, and the creation of a "beloved community."[39] It was King's insistence upon "a spiritual and moral movement with love as the guiding light" that accorded Montgomery its transcendent significance.[40]

King's theory of nonviolent resistance grew naturally out of the doctrine of Christian love that had guided the Montgomery protest from its earliest days; "We are using the weapon of love," said King in February 1956. "That is all we have."[41] The evolution of a coherent philosophical theory of nonviolence was stimulated by a variety of factors: casual comparisons between the boycott and Gandhi's salt march; the influence of advisors from the Fellowship of Reconciliation (a pacifist organization dedicated to Gandhian nonviolence); and King's own latent interest in the applicability of nonviolent resistance to the oppressed condition of American blacks. When the boycott was over, King bound these together into a coherent theory.[42]

The theory contained three basic elements: practical nonviolence, philosophical nonviolence, and direct action. Nonviolence was a practical and realistic method of conducting a protest such as the Montgomery bus boycott. Armed struggle was impractical: it merely "encourages the

opposition to threaten and resort to force," and blacks were both physically outnumbered and politically impotent.[43] Nonviolence minimized the danger of repression by mitigating the fears of the white community.[44] Moreover, unless men eliminated violence from their thinking and their behaviour, the world would be transformed into "an inferno such as even the mind of Dante could not imagine."[45] The existence of nuclear weapons decreed a choice between nonviolence or nonexistence.[46]

Philosophical nonviolence, the ethical dimension, was based on the Christian imperative of "love your enemies," and the Gandhian concept of Satyagraha, or "soul-force." Gandhi's great achievement, said King, had been to evolve a method of applying Christian morality to the task of social change; he had made love "a powerful instrument for social and collective transformation."[47] Nonviolent resistance possessed the supreme advantage of making possible an ultimate reconciliation between the oppressor and the oppressed; its strength lay in the capacity of love to win over the oppressor, and convert him into a friend.[48] By demonstrating a willingness to suffer, and by maintaining a love for those who inflicted suffering, nonviolent resistance awakened "a sense of shame within the oppressor," which would eventually be transmuted into genuine brotherhood:

> To our most bitter opponents we say, 'We shall match your capacity to inflict suffering by our capacity to endure suffering. We shall meet your physical force with soul force. . . . But be ye assured that we will

/Continued

> wear you down by our capacity to suffer. One day we shall win freedom, but not only for ourselves. We shall so appeal to your heart and conscience that we shall win you in the process, and our victory will be a double victory. 49

Direct action was the third element of nonviolent resistance. Nonviolence, insisted King, was a method of active opposition to evil, a fact which the phrase "passive resistance" tended to obscure.[50] It embodied an ethical imperative to disobey unjust laws, "because non-co-operation with evil is as much a moral obligation as co-operation with good."[51] Nonviolent resistance achieved a healthy synthesis between acquiescence and violence; it was a middle way between the parallel negative evils of bitterness and passivity.[52] In concrete terms, nonviolence enabled blacks to "take direct action against injustice without waiting for the government to act, or a majority to agree with him, or a court to rule in his favor."[53] Such a tactic provided a positive, dynamic role for Southern blacks. Instead of being the inactive objects of court decisions and legislative enactments, their own actions could constitute a powerful force for social change. By taking direct action against segregation, blacks could "speed up the coming of the inevitable." [54]

II. THE EMERGENCE OF DIRECT ACTION

The failure of school integration

"A methodology of revolution is neither born nor accepted overnight," wrote King in 1963.[55] The oldest,

largest, and most powerful civil rights organization, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, was loathe to adopt direct action in order to extend the struggle for integration into areas other than public education. It had sound tactical reasons for this. Firstly, like Virginius Dabney, the NAACP believed that school segregation was "the keystone in the arch and that if it should be knocked out the whole segregated structure would collapse;" therefore "The principal task before any community is the abolition of the segregated school."[56] Secondly, white resistance to integration was focused upon the Brown decision; it was logical for the civil rights movement to concentrate its efforts in a campaign to overcome this resistance. Finally, blacks claimed, with absolute truth, that they had the weight of the law on their side in this momentous issue: all they were seeking was compliance with a decision of the Supreme Court of the United States. In defying Brown with constitutionally discredited doctrines of Massive Resistance, nullification, and interposition, the South was in clear violation of federal law. If blacks themselves broke the law, even unconstitutional segregation laws, the legal issues would become less clear-cut, and white support for integration might well decrease.

By 1960, however, these arguments were losing force. Despite the defeat of Massive Resistance, the NAACP had little to show for its Herculean labours in the legal

struggle for the integration of Southern schools. "In the Spring of 1960," reported the Southern Regional Council, "desegregation in the Old Confederacy meant that approximately 4,200 Negro children were in school with white students." The exclusion of Texas and Florida reduced that figure to 400; and in Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, South Carolina, and Virginia segregation was intact.[57] Even where the banner of Massive Resistance had been taken down, there was no immediate prospect of genuine integration, for by approving Alabama's Pupil Placement Act, the Supreme Court made a mockery of its own 1955 order that "all deliberate speed" be employed in implementing Brown. This decision, wrote Numan V. Bartley, "legitimized a tightly-controlled tokenism . . . bringing almost anything short of Massive Resistance within the bounds of the Brown decision."[58]

Disillusionment with the NAACP

The school integration struggle revealed another weakness in the legal strategy of the NAACP: by its very nature, it allowed little room for popular participation. "When legal contests were the sole form of activity," wrote King, "the ordinary Negro was involved as a passive spectator. His interests were stirred, but his energies were unemployed."[59] Disappointment with the results of Brown, and consequent disillusionment with the NAACP, were major factors in the emergence, in 1960, of direct action movements throughout the South. The nation's failure to

implement Brown, "caused the slow ebb of the Negro's faith in litigation as the dominant method to achieve his freedom."[60]

In 1960, black students consciously departed from the legalism of the NAACP. The sit-ins, wrote Glenford E. Mitchell, a student leader in Raleigh, North Carolina, were a reaction against the "slowness and conservatism of many persons and organizations which claim to be fighters for civil rights."[61] Michael Walzer, after talking to many who took part in the Raleigh movement, reported that although they respected the NAACP, they were no longer willing to await court decisions, regarding direct action as more important.[62] Others were more blunt, "This movement is not only against segregation," claimed James Lawson of the Nashville movement. "It's against Uncle Tom Negroes, against the NAACP's over-reliance on the courts, and against the futile middle-class technique of sending letters to the centers of power."[63] It was not surprising that the students should have been skeptical of legalism: as Lewis Killian and Charles Grigg pointed out, the "law" had proved more effective in preventing integration than in furthering it.[64]

The attempt to suppress the NAACP

The appeal of direct action was also enhanced by the Southwide persecution of the NAACP. Beginning in 1956, every Southern state enacted laws designed to destroy the effectiveness of the Association's work. The assault was

a multifaceted one. Five states passed laws that prevented the NAACP from bringing suits against segregation; thus making it impossible to implement Brown without federal action; four states brought the NAACP within corporation laws, thus making it liable to pay taxes and file membership lists; five states prohibited state employees from membership in the NAACP (aimed primarily at black teachers); and seven states set up legislative committees, or state commissions, to harass and intimidate the Association.[65] Alabama, Texas, and Arkansas temporarily drove the NAACP from their territories; in Alabama, the Association ceased to exist between 1956 and 1963.[66]

The most obvious effect of this repression was a decline in the Southern membership of the NAACP. A more serious consequence was that precious time, energy, and resources, which the NAACP could have used to further integration, were wasted in lengthy legal proceedings merely to establish its right to exist; it was kept pinned down by legal guerrilla warfare, so that it was unable to implement the momentous court decisions it had helped bring about.[67] Finally (most important of all), the campaign against the NAACP encouraged the growth of groups that were less committed to legalism and more inclined towards direct action.[68] In Alabama, where the NAACP was suppressed completely, leadership of the civil rights movement in that state fell upon the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. In Birmingham, the Alabama Christian Movement

for Human Rights was formed, led by the Rev. Fred. L. Shuttlesworth; the ACMHR became the SCLC's strongest and most active affiliate.[69]

The attack on the NAACP was but one aspect of what was not only a concerted effort to avoid compliance with Brown, but also a determined campaign to stifle every expression of black or integrationist opinion. The activities of the White Citizens' Councils paralleled the legislative enactments and judicial decisions of the states. The Councils, wrote Numan V. Bartley, "closely resembled vigilante committees," employing economic coercion and physical intimidation.[70] Then there was the Ku Klux Klan, which, despite a small membership and the disapproval of "respectable" whites, constituted "a real and ever-present threat to anyone who became publicly identified with dissident behaviour or thought."[71]

The intensification of white efforts to crush civil rights groups imparted a new sense of urgency to many black leaders, more and more of whom were becoming receptive to the idea of nonviolent direct action. As the second half of the decade slipped by with integration barely nearer, King's words became increasingly relevant: "Without persistent effort, time itself becomes an ally of the insurgent and primitive forces of irrational emotionalism and social destruction."[72] It was not enough for blacks to passively await the implementation of federal court decisions. The legal manoeuvres of the South, King argued, would not only

delay compliance with Brown, but also advance the real goal of the segregationists: the complete nullification of that decision.[73] The time had come for blacks to supplement their legal and moral pressure with pressure from a "mass movement of militant quality." There was nothing more powerful than the "socially organized masses on the march."[74]

As the 1950's expired, a crucial shift in tactics was taking place within the black community, born of the realization that without an escalation of pressure, the drive for integration would be utterly defeated. Direct action was the product of a head-on collision between rising black expectations and increasing white repression.

The political isolation of Southern blacks

Direct action was also encouraged by the political isolation of Southern blacks. As the writings of C. Vann Woodward, Carl Degler, and T. Harry Williams have shown, there has been more to Southern politics than racism.[75] From time to time the politics of race have been challenged by the politics of class. In the 1890's, Populism had offered a tentative political alliance to blacks.[76] Even in Alabama, in the middle of the 1950's, Governor James Folsom resolutely spurned race-baiting. Folsom prevented the passage of segregationist legislation and vetoed measures that attacked the NAACP.[77] He even offered drinks to Adam Clayton Powell, a gesture of hospitality which had disastrous consequences for him.[78] "For the past twenty years", said Folsom in January 1955, "politicians who went

around preaching hate didn't get anywhere in politics."[79] Unfortunately, the career of his most famous successor, George Wallace, showed this belief to be tragically false.

In reality, every attempt to forge a political alliance between working-class whites and blacks had broken upon the insuperable barrier of white racism. As Charles Crowe has shown, the efforts of the Populists to secure black support in the 1890's were, like those of the Bourbons, half-hearted and motivated by political expediency. The most famous Populist advocate of black-white alliance, Tom Watson, was an unashamed white supremacist. His record as a state legislator was consistently anti-Negro, and in his later life he came to symbolize the most extreme prejudices of race and religion.[80] The flame of interracial alliance that was ignited by the Populists flickered briefly, only to be snuffed out by the Negrophobia unleashed by the cry of "black domination."

The sequel to Populism--disfranchisement, malaportionment, one-party politics, and the white primary--ensured that Southern political life was dominated by a small oligarchy of planters and industrialists, who maintained their control by exploiting the racism of the white masses.[81] If whites divided, they argued, the blacks would take over. Theodore G. Bilbo, Eugene Talmadge, and Cole Blease were far more representative of Southern politics than Huey Long. These men united virulent racism with a picturesque "common-man" style, and policies of

economic conservatism. Describing Southern politics after the end of the Second World War, V. O. Key found that throughout the region, with the possible exceptions of Alabama, Louisiana, and North Carolina, "the politics of the have-nots is quenched by contemplation of its hearing on race."[82] That issue gave the planter-mill-owner oligarchy a weapon that it used "to destroy all semblance of rational politics."[83] And, if political racism proved ineffective, the instruments of physical repression were always ready and waiting. The case of the Southern Tenant Farmer's Union was a grim reminder of the fate in store for those who dared to challenge the prevailing norms of caste and class.

Southern Populism has always struggled against overwhelming odds; as Numan V. Bartley and Hugh D. Graham pointed out, it has been "historically outweighed" by the forces of conservatism and racism.[84] Populism was an important, but nonetheless secondary, theme in Southern politics. "The central theme," argued U. B. Phillips earlier in the century, was the maintenance of white supremacy by whatever means necessary.[85] To blacks in the second half of the twentieth century, the strategy of interracial populism had a theoretical logic, but as King wrote in 1963, its rationale "wilted under the heat of fact."[86]

Another strategy theoretically open to Southern blacks was to ally with the white upper and middle-class. It was a strategy historically rooted in the political support

accorded by blacks to the Bourbon regimes of the post-Reconstruction era. Booker T. Washington became the foremost advocate of "cultivating friendly relations" with the ruling white elite.[87] Support for the Bourbons, however, had failed to prevent disfranchisement, the intensification of segregation, and the escalation of racist violence.

Blacks could not ally with white middle-class liberalism because, as a political force, it hardly existed. Its nearest equivalent, Progressivism, was, as C. Vann Woodward put it, "for whites only."[88] Many of the most famous Southern Progressives made white supremacy a central political issue, sometimes with tragic consequences, as in 1906, when Hoke Smith's racist campaign for the governorship of Georgia sparked off the Atlanta race riot.[89] Smith's contemporary, James K. Vardaman of Mississippi, combined a hatred of economic privilege with a Negrophobia which rivalled that of Tom Watson.[90] Josephus Daniels of North Carolina was, after Vardaman, perhaps the most famous of the Southern Progressives; he too was an outspoken racist, and had been one of the driving forces behind disfranchisement in his native state.[91] While it may be true, as Dewey Grantham asserted, that there was more to Southern politics in this period than "the Ku Klux Klan, prohibition, and Bible Belt fundamentalism," middle-class Progressivism had nothing to offer Southern blacks.[92]

The New Deal provided a political climate in which the seeds of a genuine liberalism finally began to germinate.

Unfortunately, the growths were stunted and unable to survive because, as Numan Bartley wrote, "The South simply lacked an adequate institutional foundation for a viable liberalism.[93] Neither the Wagner Act nor the out-lawing of the white primary had a significant impact on the social structure of the South. In spite of the former, the CIO's post-war organizing drive (Operation Dixie) failed completely; the latter had little effect because the vast majority of Southern blacks were still disfranchised.[94] The one-party system, rural overrepresentation, and--most important of all--the continued political exclusion of the black population ensured that the "neobourbons" of the Black Belt still dominated the politics of the South.[95] A resurgence of political racism was already stifling Southern liberalism before the Brown decision, as witnessed by the Dixiecrat bolt of 1948, and the 1950 defeats of Frank Graham and Claude Pepper, two outstanding examples of non-racist liberals.[96] The defeat of Graham seemed to show that, as Samuel Lubell put it, "the cry of 'Nigger' could inflame even the well-educated, well-to-do middle-class."[97]

Gunnar Myrdal, writing in the 1940's, concluded that liberalism was a weak and ineffective force in Southern politics. It was handicapped by an absence of popular support which consigned it to political impotence.[98] To retain even a marginal influence, liberals were forced to develop "the tactics of evading principles, of being very indirect in attacking problems, of cajoling, coaxing, and

luring the public into giving in on minor issues."[99] This dependence on persuasion rather than power severely handicapped the ability of the liberals to bring about change. Those who adopted a more militant and outspoken stance violated Southern norms to such an extent that they were ostracized by the white community, becoming exiles within their own land.[100] Thus, until recently, the historical form of Southern liberalism was that of a long line of individual dissenters who, while inspiring and symbolically important, did not constitute a significant political force.

It may well have been true, as King claimed in 1958, that "there are in the white South millions of people of good will" but, as he admitted, through fear, lack of leadership and the absence of an adequate means of political expression, they failed to rally in support of the Brown decision.[101] A moderate "third force" did not emerge. The overwhelming majority of Southern whites remained adamantly opposed to any form of integration. This harsh fact gave a powerful impetus to the adoption of direct action. "Negroes," wrote King, "were . . . forced to face the fact that in the South, they must move without allies."[102]

III. KING'S INFLUENCE ON THE STUDENT SIT-IN MOVEMENT

The Spread of Direct Action in the Late 1950's

As the 1950's expired, there was a mushrooming of

direct action movements in the South. As noted above, bus boycotts were launched in Atlanta, Mobile, Tallahassee, and Birmingham. Black students were in the forefront of the Tallahassee protest, and in Orangeburg, South Carolina, students at the State Teachers' College boycotted their classes after attempts were made to intimidate faculty who belonged to the NAACP.[103] The most portentious occurrence took place in 1958, when youth units of the NAACP staged lunch-counter sit-ins in Oklahoma City and Wichita, Kansas, leading to the desegregation of fifty-eight eating places.[104] It was becoming clear that blacks in the South, students in particular, were increasingly willing to engage in direct action.

Aware of this new mood, King moved to Atlanta in 1959, so that he could devote more time to the work of the SCLC. The time had come, he wrote, for:

> A full-scale assault . . . upon discrimination and segregation in all forms. We must train our youth and adult leaders in the techniques of social change through non-violent resistance. We must employ new methods of struggle, involving the masses of the people. 105

The SCLC's new programme included the training of non-violent direct action teams by James Lawson.[106] "The mass boycott, sit-down protests and strikes, sit-ins, refusal to pay fines and bail for unjust arrests," and mass marches were some of the techniques King proposed for the new phase of the struggle.[107] But before the SCLC's programme could be implemented, the black students of the South acted by themselves.

The Impact of King's Ideas on the Student Sit-in Movement

In February 1960, the student sit-in movement burst upon the world. Spreading with wildfire rapidity from Greensboro, North Carolina, to one hundred cities in twenty states, an estimated 70,000 people participated in the movement, 3,600 of whom were arrested.[108] Within a year, lunch-counters in eighty-five cities had been integrated.[109] It was, said Time, a "nonviolent protest the likes of which the U.S. had never seen."[110]

"Montgomery," wrote Coretta King, "was the soul in which the seed of a new theory of social action took root," and the student sit-ins appeared to be a concrete application of that theory.[111] It can be argued, however, that the influence of King and the SCLC upon the sit-in movement has been exaggerated. Direct action, as August Meier and Elliott Rudwick have shown, was nothing new in the annals of black protest. The boycott, in particular, was often the only weapon available to a people denied political power. In the 1870's, blacks had boycotted, sometimes successfully, segregated streetcars in Louisville, Savannah, and several other Southern cities. When segregation laws became, after the mid-1890's, increasingly oppressive, a second wave of boycotts broke out, but this time they were universally unsuccessful.[112] Neverthless, the boycott could be a devastating weapon, as Martin Luther King's grandfather demonstrated, when he organized one to put out of business a particularly racist Atlanta newspaper.[113] Other types of direct action,

including demonstrations, sit-ins and "freedom rides" had also been utilized by blacks in their quest for equal treatment. The Congress of Racial Equality, founded in 1942, had pioneered in the use of the sit-in and the freedom ride and had, moreover, based its tactics on Gandhian ideas.[114]

Nevertheless, it was to Montgomery that the students looked for inspiration in 1960. The four who sat-down at the Woolworth's lunch-counter in Greensboro, on February 1, 1960, had consumed countless hours discussing the lesson of the Montgomery movement.[115] Michael Walzer, a participant-observer in the Shaw-St. Augustine Student Movement in Raleigh, reported that "it had been the Montgomery bus boycott . . . that had been the decisive event" in preparing the students for direct action.[116]

King himself was a powerful symbol to the students. One of the Greensboro four recalled hearing King at the time of the boycott: "He was speaking the truth. He kind of made you feel as normal people would <u>have</u> to do something to better conditions."[117] In their study of the original sit-in, Frederic Solomon and Jacob R. Fishman found that King provided "a new kind of ego ideal for young Negroes."[118] Although King and the SCLC played an important part in the sit-in movement, especially in the founding of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, it was nonetheless, a secondary and supportive one. It was King's symbolic role, wrote William Robert Miller, that was supreme; "At the

height of the sit-ins, his authority was large and immediate."[119]

The students drew more than just inspiration from Montgomery. "They felt it was a lesson," wrote Solomon and Fishman, "in the practical and emotional advantages of direct action in expressing legitimate Negro discontent."[120] In their writings and utterances the students constantly referred, in distinctly King-like terms, to the theory of nonviolent resistance (nonviolent direct action). That theory served two profoundly important functions in 1960. Nonviolence gave the students a code of behaviour which they consciously adopted to shatter white racist stereotypes. Charles McDew (who became SNCC's second chairman) pointed out that instead of showing ignorance, those who sat-in "display a level of intelligence" that few of their white adversaries could match; rather than being "slovenly, unkempt, and boorish," the students "march . . . well-groomed and in quiet dignity."[121] If the sit-ins were observed with an unjaundiced eye, wrote Glenford Mitchell of the Raleigh movement, "we should be credited with some degree of intelligence and personal dignity."[122] Secondly, in its philosophical sense, nonviolence provided the students with a cogent moral justification for the kind of civil disobedience that direct action entailed. Active resistance to unjust laws, said King, was not only a right, but a moral duty. The sit-ins were justified "because their ends are humanitarian, constructive and moral."[123] The students described their lawbreaking in the highest ethical

terms. Many, it is true, viewed nonviolence merely as a tactic, and appealed to traditional American values to justify their actions. Others, however, cited the theory of nonviolent direct action, thus grounding their protest not only on self-interest, but on Christian morality.

The Nashville Student Movement

The Nashville movement was especially receptive to King's ideas, largely because one of the most dedicated disciples of nonviolence resided there. In James Lawson, an older stream of pacifism mingled with King's theory of direct action. Lawson was a committed pacifist and, like Bayard Rustin, had been jailed as a conscientious objector. He had also been attracted (independently of King) to the philosophy of Gandhi, and spent three years in India as a missionary.[124]

In 1958, militant black leadership in Nashville became institutionalized with the founding of the Nashville Christian Leadership Conference (an affiliate of the SCLC, headed by the Rev. Kelly Miller Smith), and with the opening of a regional office of the Fellowship of Reconciliation. (There were close ties between the SCLC and the FOR. Martin Luther King, Ralph Abernathy, and James Lawson were members of both organizations.)[125] The NCLC began to hold mass meetings in 1958, and formulated a desegregation plan which called for lunch-counter and restroom integration, the establishment of fair employment practices, and the upgrading of black policemen.[126] A year later, James Lawson

inaugurated, under the auspices of the NCLC and FOR, workshops on nonviolent resistance. Here, Lawson and other students explored the philosophy of nonviolence and pondered its concrete applications. At the end of the year they felt ready for action, and two lunch-counter sit-ins were held.[127] A host of future black activists attended Lawson's workshops and, through their contact with him, they were fully exposed to the theory of nonviolent direct action, which they embraced with enthusiasm.[128]

The ideas of King and Lawson were clearly evident in the conduct of the Nashville sit-in movement. "Don't strike back or curse if abused," instructed the Nashville Negro Students' Code. "Remember love and nonviolence."[129] The leaders of the Nashville movement described their activities in distinctly King-like terms. "This is not a boycott to club men down," said Dr. Vivian Henderson. "This is an economic withdrawal against evil."[130] The Rev. Kelly Miller Smith, chairman of the NCLC, similarly denied that the boycott was an aggressive weapon aimed at striking back at the white community. "Our ground for the boycott was simply that it is morally indefensible . . . to co-operate with a system we consider evil."[131]

Nonviolent Direct Action as an Ideology of Revolt

A white journalist who closely observed the Nashville movement wrote that the theory of nonviolence provided that city's black community with a concept which, "in their eyes,

threw the cloak of morality around their most powerful weapon," direct action.[132] The fact, moreover, that ministers were in the forefront of the movement gave it "a solid moral basis in the eyes of the Negro."

For four years, King had been warning blacks that "integration is not some lavish dish that the federal government or the white liberal will pass out on a silver platter;" for four years he had urged that blacks themselves speed up integration by resisting segregation--a doctrine which, as Lerone Bennett observed, had "revolutionary implications." [133] Now, in 1960, the fruits of King's labours in the years after Montgomery were apparent: large numbers of people were, at last, "peacefully, openly and nonviolently disobeying unjust laws."[134] He had provided Southern blacks with an ideology of revolt.

King's achievement, however, consisted of more than activation and inspiration: he also furnished a legitimation of the revolt he had helped to set in motion. Blacks were not fighting people, but evil and injustice; they were not seeking "victories" over whites, but winning their "friendship and understanding;" they did not oppose segregation only for themselves, but also for whites.[135] The students, King wrote, were "seeking to save the soul of America. . . . In sitting down at the lunch counters, they are really standing up for the best in the American dream."[136] By describing the civil rights movement in such terms as these, philosophic nonviolence furnished a

powerful moral justification for civil disobedience; as one writer put it, it was "a way of legitimating direct action in a society that doubted the Negro's claim to equality."[137] While it may be doubtful that nonviolence directly changed the heart of the oppressor, it nonetheless involved an unprecedented number of whites in the struggle for equality. White students, especially, both North and South, "stirred into action and formed an alliance that aroused the conscience of the nation."[138] And, as Ebony observed, the moral issue was presented in such clear-cut terms that "church groups, politicians and public figures climbed on the sit-in bandwagon."[139]

King had endowed the movement with an ideology that both mobilized white liberals and reassured white conservatives. By clothing the civil rights movement in what Lerone Bennett called "the comforting garb of love and forgiveness," he had ingeniously, although unconsciously, disguised the fact that the movement was, in fact, a social and political uprising of grand dimensions.[140]

The Effect of the Sit-ins on the Shape of the Civil Rights Movement

What had already happened in Montgomery, Tallahassee, and Birmingham, the student sit-in movement of 1960 made happen across the South: the emergence of a militant black leadership, committed to the complete destruction of segregation, and wedded to direct action as a means to that end. As King correctly perceived, the sit-in movement

speeded up the shift "from the slow court process to direct action in the form of bus protests, economic boycotts, mass marches . . . and demonstrations."[141] The students were declaring, moreover, that they would no longer concentrate their energies solely upon the drive for school integration; their protests were not aimed to win gradual, piecemeal concessions ("tokenism"), but constituted "a revolt against the whole system of Jim Crow."[142] The spirit of the sit-ins was eloquently stated by Charles McDew, future chairman of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee: "I can promise you, in the name of the militant Negro students of the South, that we shall not be satisfied until every vestige of racial segregation and discrimination are [sic] erased from the face of the earth."[143]

The sit-ins breathed new life into organizations like the Nashville Christian Leadership Council, the Alabama Christian Movement for Human Rights, the Montgomery Improvement Association, the Raleigh Citizens' Association, and the Tallahassee Inter-Civic Council. Such groups had been formed in the wake of the Montgomery bus boycott; they were committed to direct action, and enthusiastically supported the student sit-ins. "These associations," wrote William H. Peace of the Raleigh student movement, "working in close conjunction with the Negro church, became the backbone of the student movement."[144] Because these groups--often SCLC affiliates--

came to the students' aid with such alacrity and boldness, providing legal aid, bail money and, through the economic boycott, the support of the adult black community, their power and prestige was considerably enhanced. As Louis Lomax observed at the time, by becoming the determined initiators of social change, the students had "reversed the power flow within the Negro community."[145] This was an uneven process, for in the Deep South, especially, "accommodating" black leadership constituted a formidable barrier to successful direct action. Nevertheless, what was happening was unmistakeable: conservative leadership (exemplified by such college administrators as Felton G. Clark, H. Councill Trenholm, and Dr. Rufus B. Atwood) was discredited in the eyes of the black community. As Elaine Burgess observed, in a study of leadership changes at precisely this time, such men "have long since lost the right to speak for the Negro."[146]

But the change wrought by the sit-ins went further than this: they brought to bear weighty pressure upon "liberal" or "protest" black leadership (typified by the NAACP) to intensify and escalate its efforts to tear down the wall of segregation. Many observers (among them Louis Lomax, Leslie Dunbar, Lewis Killian, Charles Grigg, and--privately--Martin Luther King) noted that the sit-in movement was "an indictment of the NAACP for 'going too slow.'"[147] Such observations were only partially true: many NAACP branches were committed to militant direct

action and, as E.C. Ladd wrote, "In many parts of the South the NAACP remains the only organized protest movement and as such has a monopoly on militancy."[148] Where the NAACP wholeheartedly supported the students, its position was strengthened. However, where it attempted to prevaricate and compromise, as in Savannah and Nashville, it lost influence to SCLC-affiliated groups.[149] Throughout the South, a new, "radical" black leadership was emerging which, although often somewhat younger, followed in the footsteps of men like King, Fred Shuttlesworth, and C.K. Steele. "Many," wrote Elaine Burgess, "are young ministers just out of divinity school--Martin Luther King is their ideal. . . . They want an end to segregation in all areas of life immediately. They are angry young men who prefer boycott and mass demonstration to. . . arbitration and litigation. . . . Their appeal to youth is based on their extremely militant stand. They identify with the suppressed masses."[150]

The Montgomery bus boycott and the student sit-in movement together defined the shape of the civil rights movement. Students and young people made up the front-line "foot-soldiers," and militant adult leadership, often ministerial, rallied community support. The former were represented by SNCC and CORE, the latter by the SCLC and, on occasions, the NAACP. SNCC and the SCLC were to spearhead the civil rights movement in the South, between 1960 and 1965. Eventually, in 1966, their informal alliance came to an end, with disastrous consequences for the movement.

But for five years, the combination of SNCC's uncompromising radicalism with the tactical brilliance and political skill of the SCLC, set into motion a social revolution the repercussions of which are still being felt.

CHAPTER II

THE SOUTHERN CHRISTIAN LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE: THE EARLY YEARS

I. MARTIN LUTHER KING AND THE SCLC, 1955-1960

King's Emergence as a Leader

The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee elected to become an independent group because, as Julian Bond recalled, "it was heady stuff for young people 17 and 18 years old to be running their own political organization."[1] In addition, many of the students felt that King's leadership had proved itself to be too cautious, even conservative. It was James Lawson who had impressed them most at the Raleigh conference, for he had stressed direct action as a political weapon, rather than nonviolence as a philosophy.[2] Lawson was "a great hero to the students," remembered Cleveland Sellers. "Some of them even referred to him as 'the young people's Martin Luther King'."[3] Moreover, the SCLC's own Ella Baker advised the students to stay independent, urging them to construct an organization based not on a single leader, but on a "group-centered leadership."[4] Baker doubted that the SCLC would be an effective structure for the students' radicalism, and she had become disenchanted with King. The trouble was, she later said, that he "preached rather than dealt with."[5]

Martin Luther King was a naturally cautious man, and he could be, at times, extremely indecisive. The exercise

of leadership did not come easily to him; it was a skill he had to gradually acquire. The circumstances of his emergence as a leader throw light onto this point. Although the national and international press had spotlighted King as the dominant figure behind the Montgomery bus boycott, that protest was directed by a collective leadership. Neither the initiative for the boycott, nor the idea for the Montgomery Improvement Association had been his.[6] The fame that accrued to King was, in a sense, ironic, because as President of the MIA, he was originally intended to be little more than a figurehead. E.D. Nixon could have had the position had he chosen, but King, a newcomer to the city, "was not identified with any faction of the bitterly-divided leadership group;" in other words, King had made fewer enemies than any of the other prominent black leaders, and would thus help to unify the movement.[7] (Being an outsider also had another advantage. If the protest failed, it would be easier for King to leave the city.)[8] "We were looking for another Booker T. Washington," said Ralph Abernathy years later, in a humorous, but illuminating, comment.[9] Lawrence D. Reddick (a participant in the boycott and the "official" SCLC historian) wrote that Abernathy, E.D. Nixon, and the Rev. Solomon S. Seay dominated the movement in its early days.[10] Abernathy, especially, "had a boldness that King lacked."[11] The strength and success of the Montgomery protest was thus due not only to King's leadership, but also to the combined talents and energies

of the many men and women who ran the MIA.

The Southern Christian Leadership Conference, 1957-1960

The Montgomery bus boycott sparked off similar protests in Mobile, Tallahassee, and Birmingham, and the leaders of these movements, together with King, formed the nucleus of the SCLC.[12] On New Year's Day, 1957, C.K. Steele, Fred L. Shuttlesworth, and Martin Luther King invited Southern civil rights leaders to meet in Atlanta, and on January 10-11, sixty ministers and local NAACP officials voted to establish the Southern Negro Leadership Conference on Transportation and Nonviolent Integration.[13] At its first convention, at Montgomery in August 1957, it became the Southern Christian Leadership Conference.[14] The purpose of the new organization was to "delve deeper into the struggle" by urging "all Negroes to resist all segregation." Nonviolence and Christian love were to be the guiding principles in the fight for racial equality; while vowing to carry on "even in the face of death," the conferees promised that "not one hair of one head of one white person" would be harmed in this just cause.[15]

During its first five years, the SCLC was little more than a "paper" organization, and King, its president, seemed lost in his new role. He had little aptitude for attending to the day-to-day responsibilities of the SCLC. "I really don't have a great interest in administration," he admitted.[16] The structure of the SCLC was worked out

by Ella Baker, Stanley Levison, and Bayard Rustin, and King continued to rely on them in matters of organization, administration, and fund-raising.[17] Although a central office was set up in Atlanta, in December 1957, by 1960 the SCLC had only three permanent staff, and a budget of only $60,000.[18] "For a time," wrote Claude Sitton, "it seemed doubtful that the conference would amount to much . . . the SCLC showed a weakness for issuing statements, conducting conferences, and scheduling dramatic but ineffective demonstrations."[19]

From the outset, there was confusion and uncertainty as to the precise role of the SCLC in the fight for equal rights. Having been founded to dramatize and propagate nonviolent direct action, the SCLC decided to concentrate its resources on voter registration. "Give us the ballot," King promised at the 1957 Prayer Pilgrimage, and blacks would frame righteous laws, elect men of goodwill and wisdom, implement the Brown decision, and "transform the . . . misdeeds of the bloodthirsty mobs into the calculated good deeds of the ordinary citizens."[20]

The SCLC's first major programme was the Crusade for Citizenship. It set itself an ambitious objective: to double black voter registration in the South within five years.[21] To achieve this, the SCLC planned to set up local voter registration committees throughout the South. These would hold voting clinics, and furnish the SCLC's central office with concrete evidence of discrimination.[22] Then,

in co-operation with the NAACP, the Justice Department, the Civil Rights Commission, and liberals in Congress, the SCLC would use such evidence to "arouse the conscience of the nation" and bring about legislative relief in the field of voting rights.[23] In addition, intensive registration drives would be conducted in ten selected areas.

It soon became clear that the SCLC was ill-equipped to carry out this type of programme. Registration drives required extensive local organization. The NAACP, which had hundreds of local chapters scattered throughout the South, excelled at voter registration; the SCLC, on the other hand, lacked both the resources and the organizational structure to implement its registration programme. It was handicapped not only by a limited budget, but also by its lack of membership; the Conference consisted of a number of autonomous local affiliates, each of which represented one or several Baptist churches.[24] Whilst the Crusade sponsored successful rallies in twenty-one cities in February, 1958, the SCLC simply did not possess the structure to channel the ensuing enthusiasm into effective registration drives.[25] The plan to establish local voter registration committees never got off the ground, and merely brought the SCLC into conflict with the NAACP. To the Association, it appeared that the SCLC was usurping its own function; local registration committees, organized and financed by the SCLC, would be in direct competition with NAACP chapters. In reality, it was never King's

intention that the Conference should supplant the NAACP. Only where the Association had been suppressed would the SCLC seek to create a "mass organization," and King was always at pains to emphasize that direct action would supplement, not replace legalism.[26] Yet, inevitably, the rise of Martin Luther King and the SCLC provoked jealousy, and King privately complained that "seeds of dissension" were being sown "by persons in the top echelons of the NAACP."[27]

By the time of the SCLC's third annual convention, King was convinced of the need for a change in direction. "We have hardly scratched the surface," he admitted. The SCLC would have to develop a "positive, dynamic, and dramatic programme," which would deal with more than voter registration.[28] King's sense of urgency was prompted, at least in part, by the criticisms of Ella Baker, the SCLC's Associate Director. Baker complained that the Conference was taking its name too literally: it was holding too many meetings, too close together; there was never any time for "reflective thinking and planning."[29] Had the SCLC, she asked, "really come to grips with the job" for which it had been organized?[30] Given its minisculè staff, limited financial resources, and lack of membership, it would have to establish its own, separate identity; it would have to do something different from all the other civil rights organizations.[31]

II. THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE SCLC

Because of the inadequacies of the SCLC's structure, King's role in the student sit-in movement could be little more than an inspirational, but marginal one.[32] The circumstances of King's emergence in Montgomery, and the record of the SCLC between 1957 and 1960, show that King's leadership was ineffective in the absence of others whose talents compensated for his own deficiencies, and whose skills he could draw upon and utilize. Primarily a strategist, he needed tacticians; first and foremost a thinker and philosopher, he required others to cope with administrative detail. Only when the SCLC acquired such people did it become a living, breathing and dynamic organization. Gradually, King learned to develop and exercise a "talent for attracting and using the skills and ideas of brilliant aides and administrators."[33] While the SCLC gave much to the sit-ins and Freedom Rides, it gained even more, for in addition to extending and refining the tactics of nonviolent direct action, they provided the SCLC with an important source of recruitment. During 1960 and 1961, a group of dedicated, capable, and imaginative men and women joined the staff of the Conference and, as William Robert Miller wrote, "they made all the difference to the future of the SCLC as a dynamic action group."[34]

King's Lieutenants: The Rev. James L. Bevel

Of all the student movements, Nashville's was the

most rigorously trained and disciplined.[35] As a result, Nashville's lunch-counters were desegregated before those of any other Southern city outside Texas.[36] And not only did the Nashville Student Movement provide many of SNCC's early leaders, but it was also prominent in the Freedom Rides. When CORE's original Freedom Ride was halted by white violence in Alabama, Nashville's student leaders immediately launched a second one and, throughout the summer of 1961, they sent dozens of integrated buses to Alabama and Mississippi.[37]

Among the first of Nashville's Freedom Riders were James Lawson, Bernard Lafayette, James Bevel, Diane Nash, and C.T. Vivian, all of whom became associated with SNCC, the SCLC, or both.[38] Lawson was already the SCLC's Projects Director; he later became its Director of Non-violent Education.[39] The Rev. C.T. Vivian joined the staff of the SCLC shortly after the Freedom Rides, eventually occupying the post of Director of Affiliates. Vivian was in the forefront of the St. Augustine and Selma campaigns.[40] Bernard Lafayette, after working with SNCC and the American Friends Service Committee, became, in 1967, the SCLC's Program Director.[41] But, without a doubt, the most important of the SCLC's recruits from Nashville was James Bevel.

When he joined the staff of the SCLC in early 1962, James Luther Bevel was already a movement veteran, having participated in the sit-ins, the Freedom Rides, and the

Jackson (Mississippi) Movement.[42] Bevel soon became one of the most important members of the Conference, influencing the strategy and tactics of its campaigns from Birmingham onwards. A passionate devotee of philosophical nonviolence, Bevel was also a spell-binding orator and a tactician of brilliance and originality.[43] It was during the Birmingham campaign that his talent for inventive nonviolent direct action became apparent, for it was Bevel's idea to utilize young children in the demonstrations, a universally-acknowledged turning-point in that struggle.[44] Later, as the SCLC's Director of Direct Action, he masterminded the Selma campaign; the idea of a march from Selma to Montgomery was his.[45]

Bevel was more than a brilliant practitioner of non-violent direct action, however, he was also an incisive and original thinker. His peculiar mixture of theology and politics, as well as his appearance (he wore a Jewish Yarmulke and later grew a beard), led many to label him a mystic.[46] "I'm very Jewish in my thinking . . .," he once said. "All of my heroes.. . . were the Jewish prophets."[47] Bevel's political ideas consisted less of systematic analyses than penetrating insights that flashed in the dark. "President Johnson has signed the civil rights movement out of existence," he said after the passage of Voting Rights Act.[48] It was an observation which caused considerable confusion and consternation at the time. Yet Bevel had correctly sensed that one phase of the movement had

ended, and another was about to begin. Only later would the prophetic nature of his statement become apparent.

Although his roots were in the Black Belt of Mississippi, Bevel was chosen by King to head the SCLC's first Northern campaign, in Chicago. There, his advance team pioneered in slum organizing, a completely new technique for the SCLC. Equally important, Bevel and his staff analysed Northern racism and the economic and political institutions sustaining it. He came to define the urban ghetto as an internal colony, based upon economic exploitation rather than environmentally-caused poverty or an historically-anachronistic racism.[49] It was not an original analogy--Kenneth Clark had employed it in Dark Ghetto--but Bevel went on to extract from it the strategy and tactics of a campaign, and King readily acknowledged his intellectual debt to him.[50]

Bevel's greatest impact upon SCLC policy occurred, ironically, when he took a leave of absence. Bevel's decision to devote his energies to organizing the Spring Mobilization Against the War in Vietnam went a long way toward convincing King that he could no longer escape the obligation to take a firm and unequivocal position on the immorality of that war.[51]

The Rev. Wyatt Tee Walker

Early in 1960, the post of Executive Director of the SCLC was assumed by the Rev. Wyatt T. Walker, of Petersburg, Virgina. Walker brought badly-needed skills to that position.

Unlike King, he was an able and experienced administrator. He had headed the Petersburg Improvement Association (one of the groups inspired by the Montgomery bus boycott), and for five years was an NAACP branch president, ("reputedly one of the best branches in the nation," said Walker, who was not a man to underrate his own abilities).[52] In 1961, journalist Louis Lomax wrote that "as I studied the SCLC office . . . I got the impression that the movement was being run in King's name but by somebody else."[53] This was an exaggeration; nevertheless, Walker presided over a period of rapid expansion for the SCLC. Under his direction, the organization's budget soared from $63,000 in 1960, to nearly $1 million four years later; its staff grew from five to sixty-one.[54]

Walker's second great talent was for aggressive, militant nonviolent direct action. In 1959 and 1960 he had organized mass demonstrations against the closing of the public schools in Prince Edward County, Virginia; he was arrested on a Freedom Ride; he helped to direct the Albany (Georgia) Movement.[55] His greatest and most personal triumph, however, was the Birmingham campaign, the tactics and logistics of which he mapped out, with Fred Shuttlesworth, five months in advance.[56] But Walker's skill in nonviolent direct action was not simply a matter of organization and planning, it also lay in his conception of the purpose of direct action. Walker talked less of love, nonviolence, and Satyagrapha than of

crisis, confrontation, and disruption. "You've got to have a crisis to bargain with," he said. "To take a moderate approach hoping to get white support doesn't work."[57] Birmingham had created exactly such a crisis and, shortly afterwards, Walker proposed a nationwide work stoppage, a boycott of Christmas, and a campaign of mass direct action that would "literally immobilize the Nation."[58] Nothing came of this plan. At the end of 1964, however, Walker drew up a "Battle Plan to Totally Desegregate the City of Atlanta," and had it been adopted, "Atlanta would have been turned upside down."[59]

Walker's skills perfectly complemented those of King; "He has had a real impact on the total struggle in the South," the latter said of him in 1964.[60]

The Rev. Andrew J. Young

In contrast to Bevel, Walker and most of the SCLC's other top staff, Andrew Young did not join the Conference via a local movement, the sit-ins, or the Freedom Rides. Educated at Dillard and Howard Universities, and Hartford Theological Seminary, Young (unlike most of his colleagues in the SCLC, who were Baptists) was ordained in the largely white Congregational church.[61] After pastorates in Georgia and Alabama, he became the National Council of Churches' director of youth work.[62] It was through this position that Young was chosen to direct a foundation grant of $100,000 for voter registration and citizenship training. Nearly half of the money went to the SCLC and, with the

aid of Wyatt Walker, Dorothy Cotten, and Septima Clark, Young organized and directed a Citizenship Education Program for the Conference.[63]

Andrew Young was a man of many talents. David Lewis wrote that he possessed "a wordliness in matters of finance and organizational techniques . . . [he] spoke the language of the Eastern foundations as well as the patois of the uneducated Southern black."[64] Young had neither the mysticism of James Bevel, nor the blunt, personal aggressiveness of Hosea Williams; he was not known as a fiery and emotional preacher. Rather, as John Osborne noted, he was a "cool manager" who was "crisp and efficient" in carrying out his organizational duties, a man of considerable administrative skill.[65], This was why Young rarely went to jail: it was his task to take over the day-to-day direction of campaigns in the absence of King and Abernathy.[66]

In 1964, Young took over the job of Executive Director upon Walker's departure, a post that required the ability to impart some kind of order and efficiency to the loosely-structured and spontaneous SCLC.[67] It also demanded the quiet but firm hand of a diplomat; as Ebony put it, Young had to see that "the coordinaters" of the SCLC's various programmes were "themselves coordinated," and this was no easy task given the constantly shifting demands on the Conference's time and resources, not to mention the assertive personalities of those who directed these programmes.[68]

Young, observed the Norfolk Journal and Guide, was "one of the 'moderates' in the King organization."[69] Young's "moderation" was rooted in a firm sense of political realism. He was not given to flights of mystical fancy, nor to the kamikaze radicalism that affected many SNCC workers, for he knew that, ultimately, the civil rights movement depended upon the President and the Congress. Young's statements were characterized by pragmatic commonsense, a quality that did nothing, however, to compromise his political idealism. He became one of the SCLC's most skilful and persuasive negotiators:

> The very day in Birmingham they put the dogs and the firehoses on us, Dr. King told me to start talking. I took off my blue jeans and put on my suit . . . and sat down with the people from the Birmingham board of trade, and they understood that if we could not be free, they could not be free. 70

Hosea Williams

Newsweek once described Hosea Williams as "A chunky, cocky man who does not doubt his own organizing talents."[71] Having led one of the most successful local movements in the South, his self-confidence was not unjustified. A graduate of Atlanta University, and a World War Two veteran, in the 1950's Williams was a stalwart of the Savannah NAACP.[72] It was in the area of voter registration that he excelled. Working through the Southeastern Georgia Crusade for Voters (organized in 1960 to cover the eighteen counties that comprised the state's First Congressional District), Williams set up registration projects in seven counties,

which swiftly added 5,000 names to the voting rolls.[73] Most of his work was concentrated in Savannah, where the Chatham County Crusade for Voters was "the most effective county organization in Georgia," as well as a "disciplined political machine" which, as early as 1960, wielded considerable influence in the city's elections.[74] Led by Williams, the CCCV staged a series of spectacular demonstrations in the summer of 1963, which succeeded in desegregating Savannah's public accommodations a year before the Civil Rights Bill became law.[75]

When, in 1964, Williams was promoted to the SCLC's Director of Voter Registration and Political Education, he assumed one of the most important positions in the Conference. It became Williams's task to breathe life into the Voting Rights Act, passed in the Summer of 1965. This measure had, at last, provided black access to the ballot. The full potential of black political power could only be fulfilled, however, with patient and persistent effort from civil rights groups such as the SCLC. The movement had established the legal right; it now had to do something with it. Voter Registration and political education thus became the mainstay of the SCLC's Southern programme and, concentrated mainly in the Black Belt sections of Alabama, Georgia, North Carolina and Virginia, it made a vital contribution to the political acculturation of people for whom politics had always been, but for the brief period of Reconstruction, "white folks' business."

For Williams, direct action was an integral part of political education and, with James Bevel and C.T. Vivian, he was a master in the use of the demonstration. One of his innovations in the Savannah campaign was the night march, a dangerous tactic, but one which heightened the "creative tension" necessary for successful direct action.[76] The night march became a standard part of the SCLC'S direct action repertoire, and was employed in the St. Augustine, Selma, and Grenada campaigns.[77] Having demonstrated his capacity for leadership in Savannah, Williams could be relied on to impart discipline, enthusiasm and effectiveness to a local movement, and the day-to-day direction of both the St. Augustine and the Grenada movements fell to him.[78]

Williams was a public speaker of consumate skill, whose fire-brand oratory could literally set the feet of his listeners marching. "He whips them into a kind of patriotic fervor," observed the Charleston News and Courier; yet, with equal ease, "he can just as quickly cool their ardour by . . . calling for a word of prayer."[79] Williams's oratorical style was a reflection of his personality. "I was violent by nature," he admitted, and he remained "a very high-tempered man."[80] Unlike King, Abernathy, Bevel, or Lawson, Williams had little time for the soothing ethic of philosophical nonviolence: "I became the SCLC's Castro. I became the tough guy, the nervy guy."[81] Yet, although outwardly aggressive, with not a cautious bone in his body, he possessed an ingrained sense of political realism. He

accepted nonviolence as a practical necessity because, having been "reared on a white man's plantation" in the Deep South, he was all too aware of the brutal nature of white power.[82]

The Rev. Ralph David Abernathy

The evening before his death, Martin Luther King referred to Ralph Abernathy as "the best friend I have in the world."[83] For a crowded thirteen years Abernathy was at King's side; they did everything, including going to jail, together. Abernathy provided King with unstinting and unselfish support, informed advice and criticism, and warm personal friendship. It is no exaggeration to say that every major SCLC decision was the product of a joint effort between these two men. It is a measure of King's reliance on Abernathy that the latter accompanied him to "summit" meetings of black leaders, as well as to audiences with the President, the Pope, and various heads of state. "King saw something in Abernathy that he didn't see in the rest of us," recalled Al Sampson, an ex-SCLC staffer. "Abernathy has a rare blend of humility, patience, and integrity . . . King once told us that no man knew his philosophy better, or had the stability to hold the staff together as Abernathy did. Most of us agreed."[84]

In addition to being King's closest friend and associate, and the SCLC's Vice-President and Secretary-Treasurer, Abernathy was one of the most effective speakers in the civil rights movement. In an organization composed

of preachers, Abernathy was pre-eminent. He and King presented a contrast in styles. King's eloquence was studied, polished and, at times, highly intellectual in content. He dwelt upon the difference between eros, philia, and agape, and quoted from Thomas Carlyle, James Russell Lowell, and William Cullen Bryant. Abernathy, on the other hand, made little or no pretense to intellectual sophistication; his speeches and sermons were characterized by an earthiness and humour which he deftly used to convulse his audience and at the same time puncture and deflate the white man's pretensions to superiority:

> We don't want to be
> The white man's brother-in-law.
> Nowhere will you find it
> Where we have sought to be that.
> That's not our aim
> Whatsoever.
> All we want to be
> Is his brother.
> And it appears to us
> As we look around this audience
> Tonight
> That it is he
> Who has tried to be our brother-in-law.[85]

Abernathy had an instinctive understanding of the blacks of rural Alabama who made up the rank-and-file of the civil rights movement for, unlike King (who was brought up among the affluent middle-class of Atlanta), he was one of them.[86] He expressed as much as King (although in a different way) the religious fervour and spontaneity of the Southern movement: "When you are called upon to witness, you can't always know, can't always analyze what might happen. You just have to go."[87]

The addition of these people to the staff of the SCLC--along with many others, including the Rev. Bernard S. Lee, Dorothy Cotten, and Leon Hall--meant that by 1961 the Conference was "honed to a fine fighting edge" capable, at last, of mounting a determined and aggressive assault upon the edifice of Southern segregation.[88]

III. DIRECT ACTION AND POLICE POWER; THE CRISIS OF THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT.

The failure of the sit-in movement in the Deep South

The sit-in movement of 1960 fuelled the civil rights movement with a new dynamism, and imparted to it a new self-confidence. Black students had flexed their muscles; black communities had exercised their economic power. It was an intoxicating experience. There seemed to be no limits to the power of nonviolent direct action. James Bevel envisaged a nonviolent student movement of international dimensions; and James Lawson called for the recruitment of a "nonviolent army" to bring about "nonviolent revolution" and, if necessary, a "world-wide crisis."[89] However, when the first wave of sit-ins had ended, a sober examination of their total effect revealed that despite all the lunch-counters that had been integrated, nonviolent direct action, unaided, was severely limited in its power to eradicate segregation.

The integration victories of the sit-in movement were confined to the Upper South and the Border States. As late as September 1961, apart from Atlanta and Savannah, in the

five Deep South states segregation in public accommodations was intact.[90] In Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, Georgia, and South Carolina, sit-ins had been ruthlessly crushed by police repression and mob violence. The examples of Orangeburg, South Carolina, Montgomery, Alabama, and Jacksonville, Florida, were typical.

After a year of sitting-in, picketing, demonstrating, and going to jail, not a single lunch-counter had been integrated in Orangeburg; the city even refused to set up a bi-racial commission. Orangeburg had achieved this feat by the liberal use of fire-hoses, tear-gas, and mass arrests.[91]

On February 25, 1960, thirty-five students from Alabama State College sat-in at the cafeteria of the Montgomery County Courthouse; Governor Patterson immediately ordered their expulsion.[92] The next day, Ralph Abernathy led 1,200 in a protest march to the steps of the state capitol, and announced that they would return for a prayer meeting on March 6.[93] The Mayor of Montgomery reacted with a threat and a warning: "I feel that I must warn the Negro people of this community that the tempers of the white community . . . is [sic] being pushed beyond their power to control."[94] This blatant invitation to mob violence had the desired effect: when Abernathy and a thousand others attempted to march, they found themselves confronted by five thousand hostile white onlookers, and six hundred policemen.[95] Only when the

mob had forced the marchers to take refuge in Dexter Avenue Church did the police intervene to prevent a massacre.[96] The black community was thus thoroughly intimidated. The students of Alabama State College held two more marches, but when three hundred of them were expelled the protests came to an end.[97] Lawrence Reddick (a faculty member who was dismissed for leading one of the marches) wrote that "the experience of Alabama has shown that state power can break up a student campaign against Jim Crow."[98] Moreover, as a report of the Southern Regional Council demonstrated, Montgomery was not an isolated example: it represented "a type of Southern city that is openly, candidly, and consciously willing to accept chaos--to preserve the racial status quo."[99]

In Jacksonville, the police let white vigilante groups do virtually all their work for them. When the forces of law and order by their negligence made it plain that black demonstrators could expect no protection, mobs of white bystanders became larger and more threatening until, on August 27, 1960, 350 armed white men set about a group of sit-inners. When black youths began to retaliate, the NAACP called off the protests, and the Jacksonville movement collapsed.[100] "Here was a case," wrote Martin Oppenheimer, "where the whole community seemed to be united to preserve segregation, and prepared to permit violence to achieve that goal."[101]

The waning of student activism in the Upper South

If the sit-in movement failed completely in the Deep South, its achievements in the Upper South turned out to be, upon close examination, disappointing. Firstly, although it was true that in several cities students broadened their attack on segregation to other public accommodations, integration victories were for the most part confined to lunch-counters. Even here, white resistance, except for Texas, had been everywhere intense.[102] It was not until the end of May 1960--after nearly four months of struggle--that the sit-in movement gained its first victory.[103] If it took this long merely to integrate lunch-counters, how long would it take to integrate all the other public accommodations?

But it was not simply a question of time, of moving from one target to the next: the physical and psychological energy expended in ending a single, minor aspect of segregation left most local movements exhausted. True, there was a second wave of student-inspired nonviolent direct action aimed at cinemas, libraries, concert-halls, and parks, in early 1961.[104] It was, however, considerably smaller in geographic scope than the movement of the previous year, confined to Atlanta and about a dozen cities in the Upper South and Border States.[105] It was also true that the Freedom Rides had to a certain extent sustained the momentum of the civil rights movement but, by their very nature, they had directly involved relatively few people.

By the second half of 1961, in most cities the energy of the sit-in movement was spent. In January 1962, Time noted an overall decline in movement activity in the South.[106] As King wrote in March of that year:

> It is not practical to integrate buses, and then over an extended period of time expect to add another gain, and then another and another. Unfortunately, resistance stiffens after each limited victory; inertia sets in, and the forward movement not only slows down, but is often reversed entirely.107

The Albany Movement

The fate of the Albany Movement was a tragic proof of the correctness of King's analysis. The chronology of that campaign is a list of defeats. On November 1, 1961, eleven were forcibly ejected from the waiting-room of the Trailways bus station; on November 20, five were arrested there.[108] In December, a Freedom Ride organized by SNCC ended with the jailing of the eleven participants.[109] These arrests united the black community in support of the Albany Movement, and on December 12 the city witnessed its first mass demonstration; it was the first of many.[110] The city replied to them with mass arrests; nearly five hundred were jailed in the first two marches.[111]

These arrests were the beginning of a pattern which, despite the entry of King and the SCLC into the struggle, eventually broke the back of the Albany Movement. By July 1962, when King and Abernathy went back to jail in an attempt to inspire a new wave of demonstrations, they found that the black community was losing its faith in the tactics

of nonviolent direct action. The city's steadfast refusal to negotiate, together with its policy of mass arrests and the delaying of trials, sapped the energy and willpower of the movement, making King's threat to "turn Albany upside down" an idle one.[112] As one Southern newspaper observed, "it is now beginning to look as if the hard core of those willing to go to jail have been arrested already. Few seem willing to follow them now. . . . The Negroes of Albany appear to be tired of demonstrations which result in arrest."[113] A few gains were chalked up, such as integration of the public library, and the rail and bus station waiting rooms but, as one of the movement leaders observed, they were "negligible and hardly worth mentioning;" the bitter taste of the larger defeat had left the black population "disillusioned, frightened and bitter."[114] Visiting the city in July 1964, two years after the heyday of the movement, Reese Cleghorn found that Albany was still "a monument to white supremacy."[115]

The Achievements of the Albany Campaign

Like the crushing of the sit-in movement in the Deep South, the defeat of the Albany Movement appeared to illustrate the impotence of nonviolent direct action. It was one thing to threaten to "fill the jails," but it was another thing altogether to do it: as Cleghorn put it, "the Albany city jail . . . proved a bottomless pit."[116] Going to jail was not, of course, an end in itself: its purpose was to exert pressure upon the white community to

enter into good-faith negotiations. But what if that community was prepared, with complete equanimity, to imprison "every man, woman and child who dared protest"?[117] If such tactics were emulated throughout the South, the civil rights movement would be totally crushed.

In several ways, however, the Albany defeat was a blessing in disguise. It dispelled some of the more ingenuous and over-optimistic thinking about the power of nonviolent direct action; it highlighted the necessity for clear goals, careful planning, and co-ordinated tactics; and it demonstrated the disastrous effects of divided leadership. Most important of all was the way Albany focused attention on the larger strategic problems of the civil rights movement: the problems of police power and federal intervention.

King and his aides insisted that the Albany Movement represented an important refinement and extension of nonviolent direct action. It was, wrote Wyatt Walker, "a milepost in the early stage of the nonviolent movement" because the whole black community had united behind the campaign.[118] The brainchild of SNCC workers Charles Sherrod and Cordell Reagon, the Albany Movement was organized to bring together the faction-ridden leadership of the black community. It embraced the NAACP, the NAACP Youth Council (previously often at odds with its parent organization), the Ministerial Alliance, and SNCC.[119] King, recalling Montgomery, was impressed by this manifestation of unity.

He had never intended to commit the SCLC to the Albany struggle, but had accepted an invitation to speak there.[120] When, however, he got up to address the thousand people who packed the Shiloh Baptist Church, the congregation "so caught Dr. King in their fervor that he could not leave them."[121] King was moved by the unity and determination he saw:

> The Albany Movement is a great movement. And I think one of the things that makes it great is its universal quality. It equates all class lines--the lower, the middle and the upper classes all together. It breaks all academic lines. The PhD's and the No-D's have joined together. It breaks all denominational lines. . . . It's a movement of people of all ages from eight to eighty. So this is something remarkable in our struggle for racial justice. 122

The tactics employed by the Albany Movement also made it an escalation of nonviolent direct action. As Andrew Young saw it, nonviolence in Montgomery had been passive in character, a mere withdrawal of support from one aspect of segregation. The student sit-ins had, in a more aggressive manner, challenged another aspect of segregation. In Albany something new and exciting had taken place: an entire black community attacked segregation in its every manifestation.[123] It had utilized, moreover, a wide variety of tactics, including voter registration, boycotts, freedom rides, sit-ins, and mass marches. Albany had witnessed another highly significant tactical development: it was in Albany that King made his first appeal for clerical involvement in direct action, and seventy-five clergymen responded to his call by going to jail on Labor

Day, 1962.[124]

The Failure of the Albany Campaign

Given the power, unity, and tactical diversity of the Albany Movement, why then did it fail? The causes of the Albany defeat fell into two categories: those that were internal to the movement (its own mistakes and errors), and those that were external to it (the hostility of the federal courts and the "neutrality" of the federal government).

The leaders of the Albany Movement made a series of tactical blunders. They failed, for example, to employ legal action against the city's segregation laws until the summer of 1962, by which time the movement was already losing momentum.[125]

Another mistake had been the bus boycott, which soon put the city's bus company out of business. Ironically, the bus company agreed to the Movement's demands, but King refused to accept the settlement without the official endorsement of the Mayor and the City Council.[126] In hindsight "Martin thought it would have been better to have temporarily accepted these gains," Coretta King later wrote.[127]

It was not that the Albany Movement lacked a diversity of tactics but rather that, as Howard Zinn wrote, there was "a tendency simply to repeat old actions under new circumstances."[128] The Movement's quasi-religious faith in the power of demonstrations was another weakness. "When we speak of filling the jails," King wrote in 1963, "we

are talking of a tactic to be flexibly applied. . . . Leaders indulge in bombast if they do not take all the circumstances into account before calling upon their people to make a maximum sacrifice."[129] Unfortunately, the leaders of the Albany Movement were not blameless in this respect. The very phrase "filling the jails" was an exercise in hyperbole which both underestimated white Albany's willingness to inflict mass incarceration, and black Albany's capacity to endure it. The belief that the Movement could literally fill up the jails was a naïveté born of inexperience. "Pritchett [Albany's chief of police] was hep to the fact that we couldn't," said Bill Hansen of SNCC. "We ran out of people before he ran out of jails."[130] Many of these tactical mistakes resulted from the lack of a clear-cut, overall plan. "There wasn't any real strategy in Albany," Andrew Young later recalled. "I remember being around and not knowing what to do."[131] Reflecting the religious fervour of the rank-and-file, the Movement's leaders tended to substitute spontaneity for planning, "spirit" for strategy. The militancy of the black community, instead of being directed against a few, carefully-chosen targets for maximum effect, was squandered in a diffuse attack upon segregation as a whole.[132] "One of the principal mistakes we had made there was to scatter our efforts too widely," admitted King.[133]

The tactical errors of the Albany Movement were compounded by serious divisions within its leadership.

Although King's participation was warmly welcomed by Dr. W.G. Anderson, the Movement's president, it aroused jealousy and resentment in some of the other leaders.[134] They reacted against what they deemed the imperious behaviour of some of King's subordinates, notably Ralph Abernathy and Wyatt Walker. According to Louis Lomax's 1962 account, "Walker began to issue organizational orders and commands. Local Negroes got mad."[135] Marion Page, who had been the Albany Movement's executive secretary, stated in more general terms that "People who had done the fighting felt they were being given a back seat."[136]

Such complaints had some justification. Walker, for example, later admitted the accuracy of Lomax's unflattering account of his role in Albany.[137] Yet it would be a gross exaggeration to pose the leadership conflict in terms of a simple dichotomy between outside direction and local control, or between the moderation of the SCLC on the one hand, and the determined militancy of SNCC and the Albany Movement on the other. Explaining why the SCLC had failed to make the impact expected of it, Lomax observed that while the leaders of local movements welcomed support from King as an inspirational symbol, they had no wish to relinquish their own personal control.[138] This was certainly true of some of the leaders of the Albany Movement (including many of the SNCC workers), whose hostility to the SCLC was in large part motivated by simple jealousy. An understanding of these feelings helps

to account for the agreement that was negotiated with the city on December 18, 1961. It was a puzzling truce for two reasons. Firstly it was engineered by SNCC and the Albany Movement without the knowledge or consent of either King or Anderson who, with Ralph Abernathy, were in jail at the time, having vowed to remain there over Christmas, and having invited "thousands" of others to join them.[139] Secondly the terms of the agreement were so unsatisfactory when compared with the stated goals of the Movement, that the New York Herald Tribune called it "one of the most stunning defeats" of King's career.[140] David Lewis, in his scrupulously fair account of the campaign, concluded that the leaders of the Movement agreed to an inconclusive and unsatisfactory truce in order to get King out of jail and out of town; the pact was "confused and ulteriorly motivated."[141] King had little choice but to leave jail and proclaim a victory, but he later told Time "I'm sorry I was bailed out. . . . We thought that the victory had been won. When we got out, we discovered it was all a hoax."[142] He accepted, he said, "a share of the responsibility" for the campaign's failure, and there seems no reason to doubt that the SCLC had been insensitive to the feelings and opinions of the local leadership.[143] On the other hand, Louis Lomax's indictment of the SCLC was "hugely exaggerated."[144] In David Lewis's view the fatal flaw in the Albany campaign was "not that Martin monopolized and moderated its strength away," but rather

that "he completely failed . . . to enforce unity upon an essentially anarchic and querulous mosaic of inexperienced groups."[145]

IV. THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT AND THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT: THE FAILURES OF THE KENNEDY ADMINISTRATION

Pat Watters interviewed the surviving leaders of the Albany Movement nearly a decade after the campaign. Chastened and bitter, they exuded little of the spirit that had characterized the early days of the movement. In light of the opposition, hatred, and brutality they had encountered in the white community, the ethic of philosophic nonviolence appeared, in hindsight, grotesquely inappropriate. How could nonviolence touch the heart and conscience of the white community when, as the Rev. Samuel Wells put it, "the white community was without a heart, without a conscience"?[146] The mass meetings of the movement, in which the black community was enjoined to display love for its oppressors, "seem in retrospect almost a burlesque," said C.B.King.[147]

Being the Deep South, the uncompromisingly hostile attitude of white Albany was perhaps only to be expected. Even King was realistic enough to know that love and nonviolence did not immediately convert the oppressor to the cause of justice: "Men are not easily moved from . . . their prejudiced and irrational feelings;" in Montgomery, and across the South, "the initial white reaction to Negro resistance has been bitter."[148] But neither King nor the

other leaders of the Albany Movement had been prepared for their almost complete failure to evoke a sympathetic response from the federal government.

Civil Rights and the Kennedy Administration

Civil rights leaders had greeted the election of John F, Kennedy with great hope. Even if he had not intervened to get King out of a DeKalb County, Georgia, jail, he would have little difficulty in improving upon the civil rights record of the previous administration; as John A. Williams put it, "no one could be as stolid or as unmoved by the cresting tide of black frustration as the Republicans."[149] Kennedy did not make extravagant promises; no new civil rights legislation would be introduced in the near future. However, he vowed to utilize the full power of the Executive to eliminate discrimination in housing, the federal government itself, and in contracts of the federal government.[150] In addition, the Justice Department would initiate litigation to strike down poll taxes &literacy tests, thus removing the obstacles to black voting.[151]

Black leaders like Roy Wilkins and Martin Luther King were not unsympathetic to the Kennedy strategy; they were aware of his narrow electoral majority and consequent dependence upon Southern support in the Congress. They knew moreover, that Kennedy was correct in his claim that much could be done without new legislation, and they were quick to point out the specific areas in which discrimination

could be eliminated by Executive action. The Leadership Conference on Civil Rights urged the federal government to put its own house in order first, and then use the federal power of the purse to enforce non-discrimination in state programs that received federal aid.[152] King, too, was happy to show the new President exactly where he could act. If the Executive recognized its inherent power and utilized it to the full, it could "wipe out every vestige of federal support and sponsorship of discrimination."[153] For example, the President could, by an Executive Order, put an "immediate end to all discriminations in any housing accommodations financed with federal aid."[154] Above all, the Executive effort should be coordinated, thorough, and informed by a "recognition by the government of its moral obligation to solve the problem."[155]

Rare is the politician who fulfills his campaign promises, especially according to the declared schedule; even rarer is the civil rights leader who fails to criticize, in strident terms, the politician's performance. Kennedy's performance was better than any of his predecessors', but black disappointment with his civil rights programme was not contrived or ritualistic, but real and deep. The President's Executive actions were limited in scope and weak in enforcement. His Housing Order covered only a fifth of all new housing, and no legal action was taken to enforce it. The Executive Order on Employment was even more anaemic: as late as 1965, not a single contract had been cancelled for its violation. Segregation in federal programmes continued

as ever, and in 1963 the President refused the recommendation of the Civil Rights Commission that federal grants-in-aid to Mississippi be terminated; he even refused permission for the Commission to hold hearings in that state.[156]

Two critiques of the Kennedy civil rights record appeared in March 1962. From the Southern Regional Council came a report which, although a cautious mixture of praise and blame, raised serious doubts as to the basic feasibility of the Administration's strategy, especially with regard to education and voting rights.[157] Moreover, in the sphere of Executive action there was a distressing tendency for "activity and energy" to "become a substitute for results."[158] For example, the trouble-shooting activities of the Justice Department, while conveying an impression of government concern and involvement, often disguised the fact that all that was being sought was the maintenance of public order or, at the most, "token compliance with the law."[159] The highly-publicized interventions of the Justice Department were "lid-keeping operations," said John Nolan. "We weren't trying to solve the civil rights problems of the USA. We were just trying to keep people from getting hurt."[160] Martin Luther King offered a similar assessment, couched in considerably blunter language. The Kennedy record, he wrote, was characterized by a narrowing of goals and a decline in energy and interest. "As the year 1961 unfolded, Executive

initiative became increasingly feeble, and the chilling prospect emerged of a general Administration retreat."[161] Priority was being accorded to the Administration's general legislative programme--which did not include a civil rights bill.[162] It was in this discouraging context that the Albany campaign took place.

The Federal Government and the Albany Campaign

The SCLC's involvement in Albany was unplanned, spontaneous and, according to Coretta King, something of a diversion for "Martin . . . did not feel that it was the time for our strength to be diffused in local confrontations which might better be settled by national action."[163] Yet the Albany campaign, by its very failure, brought into focus the impelling need for just such national action.

"From the beginning," wrote Fred Powledge, "Albany was a city that non-violent demonstration was not going to change."[164] Nevertheless, if nonviolence failed to move the white community, the leaders of the Albany Movement looked expectantly and hopefully to a measure of aid and intervention from the federal government. While non-violence might not immediately convert the oppressor, it at least dramatized and publicized the oppression, so that an aroused nation could put pressure upon its government to act.[165] The government, however, did not act in Albany, except to file an amicus curiae brief in support of the Movement's suit to deny the city a permanent injunction against demonstrations.[166] Only when King was

in jail did the Justice Department display a measure of energy--to get him out.[167] On July 13, 1962--their third day in jail--"we were summoned to Pritchett's office, only to discover that we had been tricked out of jail": a "stranger", commonly believed to have been a representative of the Justice Department, had paid King and Abernathy's fine.[168] Later, when they were contemplating returning to prison, Robert Kennedy urged King not to do so, advising him to "close up" his campaign in Albany.[169]

The federal government's inactivity, and its eagerness to end what it perceived as a political embarrassment, were profoundly disillusioning for the leaders of the Albany Movement. "Promise after promise and nothing would happen," recalled Marion Page.[170] Disenchantment with the federal government affected even the most unsophisticated and believing, said C.B. King, like the old black woman who said, "Son, I done found out that even the government is a white man."[171] In private, Martin Luther King was angry at the Administration's role in Albany: "They just don't know what we're up against," he told Coretta.[172] At the same time however, although painful, Albany was a valuable political education for King. Firstly, although King believed that order could not be expected to co-exist with injustice, the government was clearly prepared to tolerate a considerable measure of the latter to ensure the preservation of the former. Albany demonstrated that a white Southern community was free to crush nonviolent direct action

as long as it avoided the kind of overt brutality that could be spotlighted in the glare of national and international publicity. Only when whites unashamedly utilized open and--more especially--private violence, would the federal government intervene. King always took great pains to distinguish between the use of moral means for moral ends, and the use of moral means for immoral ends. It was a simple distinction but it was nonetheless lost upon Robert Kennedy and such organs of liberal opinion as the New York Times and the Atlanta Constitution, all of whom praised Albany police chief Laurie Pritchett for using "nonviolence."[173] But as the Georgia Council on Human Relations pointed out, Pritchett had used nonviolence to throttle free expression and turn Albany into a police state.[174] ("Now It's Passive Resistance by Whites," proclaimed US News and World Report.) [175]

Secondly, although King's faith in the Kennedy Administration had not been completely undermined, he was learning that, as Howard Zinn put it, "the government . . . has a hierarchy of values, in which political self-interest is at the top."[176] A cynic, wrote King, would hold that the inadequacies of government civil rights policy were the inevitable result of attempting to please both blacks and segregationists: the government "wants the vote of both and is paralyzed by the conflicting needs of each."[177] King refused to ascribe such hypocritical motives to the Administration; he preferred to believe that it had made a genuine mistake, having "misunderstood the forces at play"

in the South.[178] Nevertheless, Albany had made one thing crystal-clear: if the civil rights movement was left to the mercies of the Laurie Pritchetts of the South, it would everywhere go down to defeat. Indeed, this was already happening. "The idea whose time had come moved on," wrote King in August 1962. "Over the rubble left by the violence of mobsters, many communities resumed their normal activities on a new basis of partial integration."[179]

The abolition of segregation would require a federal commitment, a reordering of governmental priorities. The SCLC's next campaign would be attended by such shocking police brutality that civil rights, from an issue of secondary political importance, would be transformed into one of overriding national urgency; it would create a crisis of such proportions that the government could not, as John Kennedy put it, "prudently choose to ignore" the cry for equality.[180]

CHAPTER III

THE BIRMINGHAM CAMPAIGN AND THE TRIUMPH OF NONVIOLENT DIRECT ACTION

I. THE ROLE OF THE SCLC IN THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT

The civil rights movement was a "push from below," intensely local, spontaneous, and independent in character.[1] The principal task of the direct action civil rights organizations was to support these local struggles, furnishing them with expertise, legal aid, publicity, and moral inspiration. The SCLC, when it was not engaged in one of its major campaigns, was lending support to the many lesser-known fights that were being waged by its various affiliates in cities across the South.

The SCLC was frequently criticized for taking undeserved credit for the work of other organizations. While SNCC, CORE, and the NAACP carried out most of the direct action and voter registration in the South, the Conference tended to "specialize in a few showy projects," bringing it immense publicity, and leading whites to erroneously identify King as the "leader" of the civil rights movement.[2] Although often prompted by the intense rivalry and competition for funds that existed among the different civil rights organizations, these criticisms contained an element of truth. With a much smaller budget, SNCC maintained a considerably larger field staff and, in addition to carrying

out most of the voter registration work in Mississippi, SNCC originated several of the movements (including Albany, Danville, Selma, and Americus) that were subsequently taken over and made famous by the SCLC. The importance of CORE's work, especially in North Carolina, Louisiana, and Florida, has been amply documented by August Meier and Elliott Rudwick.[3]

The SCLC's importance in the civil rights movement was greater, however, than a mere enumeration of its campaigns would lead one to believe. Firstly, its major campaigns were "direction-turning events" which promoted national legislation and provided momentum for the whole of the civil rights movement; secondly, King's philosophy of nonviolence was profoundly influential in both SNCC and CORE; thirdly, King possessed a unique role in the civil rights movement as its focus, its inspirational leader, and its most widely-recognized spokesman; finally, the SCLC was singularly close to the heart of the black community, the church.[4]

The SCLC's Operational Technique

In 1964, King claimed that "the SCLC was, in large measure, responsible for the beginning of a new day" for Southern blacks.[5] Between 1963 and 1965, the Conference developed an operational technique of devastating effectiveness. Perfected in Birmingham and repeated in Selma, it called for a concentration of the SCLC's resources in a single city, one which epitomized intransigent racism.

Slowly and inexorably, a gradually escalating campaign of nonviolent direct action would paralyze and disrupt the city's normal life. Ensuing mass arrests and police brutality were deftly exploited to discredit the forces of segregation. These campaigns had a triple impact. Aided by federal intervention, they achieved a breach in the wall of the city's rigid segregation. In addition, because of the dramatic way in which they were conducted, they gave focus and inspiration to the whole of the civil rights movement, sparking off new waves of direct action across the South. Thirdly, they pressured, embarrassed, and cajoled the federal government into introducing national legislation, and the moral indignation they unleashed provided the momentum for its passage through Congress. "What lobbying and imploring could not do in legislative halls," wrote King, "marching feet accomplished a thousand miles away."[6]

Some observers complained that the SCIC was guilty of coldly "exploiting the bravery and spirit of local movements."[7] There was truth in the charge. The Conference mounted demonstrations in the knowledge that their participants would be gassed, beaten, or jailed. Often, moreover, such demonstrations achieved nothing. Len Holt, who took part in the SCIC's Danville campaign, denounced "the tactic of massive, blockbuster, blunderbuss marching of black bodies down hot Southern streets" in the naïve hope that their suffering would somehow persuade the oppressor to mend his ways.[8]

Nevertheless, there was method in this apparent madness.. Individual campaigns might not lead to an immediate change in local conditions, but, by keeping the South in rebellious ferment, dozens of such campaigns would demonstrate that segregation could no longer be supported but by methods that were unacceptable to the non-South. The SCLC's greatest strength observed Pat Watters, was its "sound grasp of the American socio-political reality."[9] King and his associates addressed their campaigns to white Northerners, liberals in particular, because only they had the power to effect the kinds of reforms that the movement desired. The SCLC "dramatized" injustice in a literal fashion, presenting white Northerners with "a great televised morality play, white hats and black hats; lift up the black hat and there would be the white face of Bull Connor; lift up the white hat and there would be the solemn black face of Martin Luther King shouting love."[10]

The SCLC recognized that Southern white violence was the most powerful ally of the civil rights movement. Thus, paradoxically, while King abhorred violence, the tactics of the SCLC were geared to "securing publicity through . . . precipitating violence from white hoodlums and law enforcement officers."[11] King vigorously denied that the SCLC "provoked" white violence. As Andrew Young explained:

> The movement did not 'cause' problems in Selma . . . It just brought them to the surface where they could be dealt with. Sheriff Clark has been beating black heads in the back of the jail for years, and we're only saying to him that if he still wants to beat black heads, he'll have to do it on Main Street, at noon, in front of CBS, NBC, and ABC television cameras.[12]

The typical SCLC campaign was a series of carefully-timed manoeuvres, each designed to attract the maximum amount of publicity: the slow beginning, followed by the gradual, tense, escalation; the dramatic confrontation between demonstrators and police; the courageous defiance of the injunction, with King going to jail and addressing an impassioned open letter to the nation; the importation of prominent white supporters; and the orchestrated outcry of moral indignation from white liberals in Congress and across the country.

"The entire racial panorama," complained a Florida newspaper apropos the St. Augustine campaign, "was staged using the Nation's Oldest City as the theater, and world-wide television and news media readers as the audience."[13] The genius of the SCLC was its ability to defeat the forces of segregation by turning their own violence against them; they were now forced to commit their brutality "openly--in the light of day--with the rest of the world looking on."[14] Every time a Southern sheriff clubbed a nonviolent demonstrator, he was putting one more nail in the coffin of segregation. The crude, stupid repression of Bull Connor and Jim Clark was no match for the subtle nonviolence of Martin Luther King. They were simply outwitted.

King as the Symbolic Leader of the Civil Rights Movement

"Like Paul," wrote King from the Birmingham City jail, "I must constantly respond to the Macedonian call for help."[15] The analogy was entirely appropriate. In 1962, Louis Lomax had thought of the parallel, writing, "Not only does he go from town to town inspiring Negroes to take action, but he returns to suffer with them in their time of trouble."[16] When King was not writing, fund-raising, or conducting major campaigns, he was travelling the length and breadth of the South, several times each year, speaking and preaching at innumerable churches and meeting-places, encouraging blacks in their struggles.

His unique prestige was recorded by Newsweek in 1963, when it found that he was far and away the most respected black leader, in the North, the South, and among other black leaders.[17] A more concrete indication--and application--of King's popularity was his capacity to attract audiences and swell the ranks of demonstrations. "King packs them in," admitted the national church secretary of the NAACP.[18] His presence could revive a flagging campaign, or spark off a new one; wherever he went, whether it was Albany, Georgia, Danville, Virginia, or Detroit, Michigan, King persuaded unprecedented numbers to take part in the struggle for civil rights.

What is the explanation for King's immense popularity? Although he could provide local movements with only a limited amount of help, he could impart to his audiences

inspiration, a sense of their own worth and power, and a renewed faith in the future. Direct action demanded of the participant an unusually high degree of physical bravery. Economic reprisal, police brutality, incarceration, and possible death were ever-present threats to those who, in the Deep South, dared to march, sit-in, or register to vote. In the unreported struggles of countless Southern towns, there was little to inhibit the violence of public officials and private vigilantes. King, in his thousands of speeches and sermons, asked blacks to rise to that degree of courage:

> Now we're just gonne march. If you're hit, don't hit back. They may curse you; don't curse back. They may beat you and push you around, but just keep goin'. They may even try to kill you, but just develop that quiet courage to die if necessary, without killing--and just keep on marchin'.19

This was King's constant message, and its appeal was strengthened by the fact that he so obviously embodied the quality of courage. His own sacrifices tended, as William Robert Miller noted, "to magnify his sense of a literal discipleship of the cross," and many of his speeches appeared egotistic.[20] The story of the 1959 attempt on his life, accounts of the threatening telephone calls he received, and affirmations of his willingness to suffer death recurred in his speeches and sermons.[21] Yet King tried to consciously avoid "developing a martyr complex and . . . seeking sympathy" and, through his own personal example, he sought to

impart courage to others.[22]

King also imbued his listeners with a sense of their own power and worth. Blacks themselves, he insisted, had the power to mould their own future. Freedom would never come from the federal government, the Supreme Court, or the Congress: "The salvation of the Negro . . . is in the hands and soul of the Negro himself."[23] And blacks would never work out their own salvation unless they believed that they were, in fact, the equals of whites. Long before the doctrine of Black Power was enunciated, King was urging blacks to "straighten their backs up," and replace "self-pity with self-respect, and self-deprecation with dignity."[24] Direct action was a way of achieving this: the very act of defiance brought about an inner transformation; even if it did not bring about immediate, tangible gains, it was an essential pre-condition for their eventual attainment. Through direct action, "the Negro dissolved the stereotype of the grinning, submissive Uncle Tom. He came out of his struggle integrated only slightly in the external society, but powerfully integrated within. This was a victory that had to precede all other gains."[25]

Faith in the future and a confident expectation of eventual victory were the spiritual dynamics of the civil rights movement. It was expressed in its anthem: "We Shall Overcome." Fear of retribution and reprisal could only itself be overcome by hope, and King, "better

than anyone else . . . articulates the aspirations of Negroes who respond to the cadence of his addresses, his religious phraseology, and the vision of his dream for them and America."[26] By describing this dream in simple but eloquent terms, King convinced his listeners that the marching, the jailings, and the beatings would not be in vain:

> There is nothing in this world more powerful than the power of the human soul, and if we mobilize this soul force . . . we will be able to transform this community, and we will see something new and powerful. And we'll be eating where we couldn't eat before. We will be marching where we couldn't march before. We will be doing things that we couldn't be doing before.[27]

To a movement besieged by violence and repression, King offered the sustaining hope that one day "justice will be a reality for all."[28] Cleveland Sellers, one of King's critics in SNCC, marched alongside him through Mississippi during the Meredith March, and later tried to analyze what he meant to the poor blacks of the South:

> It's difficult to explain . . . He was a symbol of all their hopes for a better life. By being there and showing that he really cared, he was helping to destroy barriers of fear and insecurity. . . . They trusted him. Most important, he made it possible for them to believe that they could overcome.[29]

The SCLC and the black church in the civil rights movement

"Who is it," asked King, "who is supposed to articulate the longings and aspirations of the people more than the preacher?"[30] No account of the part played by the SCLC in the civil rights movement would be

complete without reference to its relationship to the black church.

The church was "the oldest and--in membership--by far the strongest of all Negro organizations."[31] By virtue of its existence as a totally segregated institution, the black church was virtually the only social entity that was "actually owned and completely controlled" by blacks themselves.[32] The black minister, financially independent from the white community, occupied a unique position because, as Benjamin Mays and Joseph W. Nicholson pointed out in the 1930's, his independence made him the freest man in the black community, and hence a natural focus of leadership.[33] The black church, moreover, served not only a religious function: as the solitary black-controlled institution, a variety of other, purely social functions accrued to it. Wrote Charles S. Johnson in 1941:

> Among rural Negroes the church is still the only institution which provides an effective organization of the group, an approved and tolerated place for social activities, a forum for expression on many issues, an outlet for emotional repressions, and a plan for social living. It is a complex institution meeting a wide variety of needs. 34

Few who knew the black church denied its immense power, nor its potential as a force for social change. "It has the Negro masses organized," wrote Myrdal, "and . . . could line up the Negroes behind a program" if it so chose.[35] Yet the church was the despair of black leaders who sought to improve the lot of their

people. Myrdal admitted that there were no signs of social or political involvement by the church, and noted that black ministers displayed an almost total lack of militancy.[36] The traditional complaint was that the church provided blacks with an emotional catharsis that merely served to reinforce their passivity and acceptance of the status quo; it furnished a haven and a refuge, but did nothing to sensitize blacks to their everyday problems, let alone provide positive leadership. Even Booker T. Washington had complained that the black church was too other-worldly and, half a century later, King was making the same criticism: "too many Negro churches . . . are so absorbed in a future good 'over yonder' that they condition their members to adjust to the present evils over here."[37] Even those churches that managed to escape this kind of fervid emotionalism, tended to be afflicted with middle-class exclusivism, and a desire to dis-associate from the black lower-class. Both types of black church divorced religion from reality, and the faiths they practiced made for "a dangerously irrelevant church where people assemble to hear only pious platitudes."[38]

The SCLC was founded in the belief that black ministers were ready to assume the leadership of the emerging civil rights movement, and it was an assumption that did not go entirely unfulfilled. By the early

1960's, the traditional passivity and other-worldly escapism of the church had given way to an unprecedented degree of social and political involvement; the church became the black's "weapon of protest, his protective fortress behind which he seeks to withstand the assaults of a hostile world and within which he plans his strategies of defiance, harassment, and, at times, his frontal attacks against racial barriers."[39] The SCLC was the most religious of all the various civil rights organizations, consisting of (as Andrew Young put it) "a bunch of Baptist preachers."[40] It was the SCLC's relationship to the black church--the very heart of the black community--that gave it a prestige and influence within the civil rights movement that SNCC and CORE were unable to match.

The most practical contribution of the black church was to provide a basic structure of local organization for the movement. As Wyatt Walker pointed out:

> it's the most organized thing in the Negro's life. Whatever you want to do in the Negro community . . . you've got to do it through the Negro church, or it doesn't get done. The church today is central to the movement. If a Negro's going to have a meeting, where's he going to have it? . . . if there had been no Negro church, there would have been no civil rights movement today.41

The church was also an obvious source of leadership. Ministers were the backbone of the black middle-class, especially in the Deep South, where black doctors, lawyers, and businessmen were few and far between. Teachers, numerically the largest element of the black

middle-class, were inhibited from assuming movement leadership because of their financial dependence on the white community. Economic independence was the sine que non of black leadership and, for this very reason, more than a third of the black political and civil rights leaders in the South were ministers.[42] A fifth of the NAACP's local branches were headed by clergymen, and over a half of the SCLC's local affiliates were church organizations.[43]

Only a few of the black clergy actively participated in the civil rights movement; they were, in fact, a small minority. Wyatt Walker estimated that only about twenty of the 250 black ministers in Birmingham had been active in the SCLC's campaign there, and in many communities there was an almost total absence of militant clerical leadership.[44] In view of the minority status of the activist black clergy, some have wondered whether the black church inhibited rather than promoted the civil rights movement; whether, as Gary T. Marx asked, religion was an "opiate" rather than an "inspiration."[45]

In discussing the general passivity of the church, Gunnar Myrdal pointed out that "the Negro church fundamentally is an expression of the Negro community itself. . . . If the preachers have been timid and pussyfooting, it is because Negroes in general have condoned such a policy and would have feared radical leaders."[46] This

observation was still pertinent two decades later: general black participation in the civil rights movement was confined to a relatively small minority.[47] The contribution of the black church must be judged in terms of the activism of the committed minority, rather than the passivity of the apathetic majority.

The new leadership role of the black church, or a section of it, was a reflection of changes within the larger black community. In the 1940's, Myrdal had noted that black ministers were perceptibly losing influence "because they are not changing as fast as the rest of the Negro community." Leadership was shifting to other middle-class elements, to "professionals, businessmen, politicians, and labor union officials." Yet, Myrdal continued, this process of change was a circular one: the rising political consciousness of their congregations, and the increasing competition from other elements of the black middle-class would compel black clergymen "to try to do something positive for the Negro community."[48] The emergence of militant clerical leadership in the civil rights movement was not so much a conscious attempt by the black church to "catch up" with its members, but denoted the rise of a new generation of clergymen who were affected by the same educational and attitudinal changes as the black middle-class as a whole. King, Andrew Young, Ralph Abernathy, Wyatt Walker, James Bevel and the other

preachers who made up the leadership of the SCLC represented a new type of black minister: college-educated and seminary-trained, race-conscious, and politically aware, they were willing, indeed eager, to pick up the mantle of leadership.

The militant clergy, although only a minority, exerted a disproportionate influence in the black community. In his study of the black ministry in Detroit, Ronald L. Johnstone found that the militants had considerably larger congregations, sought to influence their members' votes, and were active in far more political and civil rights organizations.[49] Moreover, as many studies have demonstrated, conservative black leaders who refused to challenge the racial status quo had, by the early 1960's, lost the authority to speak for the majority of blacks on political and civil rights issues.[50] While black ministers of this type might retain respect and affection within the walls of their churches, their congregations looked to the militants to provide leadership outside them.

The Religious Mode of Thinking in the Civil Rights Movement

E. Franklin Frazier was convinced that the Gandhian philosophy of nonviolence was something quite alien to American blacks; it was "a way of life . . . that has nothing in common with the social heritage of the Negro."[51] Black psychologist Kenneth B. Clark went even

further, terming nonviolence as "pathological" in that it demanded an unrealistic, and therefore mentally harmful response from the victims of oppression.[52] Others, on the other hand, attributed King's success to his ability to attune the philosophy of nonviolence to the religious beliefs of his followers. "Redemptive love came naturally to Negro Southerners," insisted John Lewis of SNCC.[53] Ralph Ellison, refuting Clark's criticisms, argued that "Martin Luther King isn't working out of yesterday or the day before yesterday. He is working out of a long history of Negro tradition and wisdom."[54]

Even King's critics agreed that nonviolence was a soundly practical method of social protest, in view of the actual position of Southern blacks. "Nonviolence was the only possibility," admitted Stokely Carmichael in 1970.[55] Yet the dividing line between pragmatic and philosophic nonviolence was far from clear: the two categories tended to merge into each other. Blacks in the South had always been forced to accept "nonviolence" as a matter of phsyical survival. In addition, although oppressed throughout their history, blacks had displayed remarkably little bitterness and hatred. Ralph Ellison saw these two facts as connected:

> Southern Negroes learned about violence in a very tough school. They have known for a long time that they can take a lot of head-whipping and survive and go on working toward their own goals . . . So today we sacrifice, as we sacrificed yesterday, the pleasure of personal retaliation in the interest of the common good.[56]

The knowledge, moreover, that the history of blacks and whites in the South had, for hundreds of years, been intertwined, and would continue to be so--even more closely--in the future, gave philosophic nonviolence a certain practical aspect. "Here in America," said Aaron Henry of the Mississippi NAACP, "our white brother and our black brother are going to be still right here. Therefore, it has to be this symbiotic kind of response and respect, one for the other."[57] Even those who were intellectually skeptical of philosophic nonviolence recognized this need. Practical and spiritual nonviolence merged because, as Robert Moses of SNCC put it, "in the end everybody has to live together." Moses, who rejected King's brand of nonviolence (love for the oppressor), nonetheless recognized the necessity to preserve "Humanitarian values," and to avoid, in the process of liberating black people, the subjugation--even the mental subjugation--of others. Bitterness was something to be avoided because "the less overlay of bitterness, the more possible to work out a reconciliation."[58]

Whether or not nonviolence was alien to black culture, the civil rights movement had a strongly religious orientation. "As Negro students . . . sing their gospel songs in response to violence," wrote E. Franklin Frazier, "they are behaving in accordance with the religious heritage of the Negro."[59] Apart from the brief period of Reconstruction, most Southern blacks had never participated

in the political process, and religion, since slavery days, as well as providing a spiritual refuge from secular oppression, also furnished a language in which to express the ever-present desire for freedom and equality. In the civil rights movement, religion was a common mode of expression for political ideas; "People saw the mass meetings as an extension of the Sunday services," recalled John Lewis.[60] King, and the ministers who emulated him, "translated Christianity into a hard-headed--if nonviolent--fight in the streets for equal rights."[61] They did not distinguish between religion and politics, and used simple religious concepts to propound the principle of social and political equality: "We are saying that we are God's children, and we don't have to live as we are forced to live."[62] The Christian doctrine of the equality of all before God had radical implications in a society founded and perpetuated on racism. Religion became a substitute for political ideology:

> I don't care what kind of injunction the city attorney seeks to get, he cannot enjoin God. This is God's movement. . . . There can be no injunction against God. Because Albany does not belong to Democratic party of the state of Georgia. . . . Albany does not belong to the white people of the state of Georgia. All-benny belongs to God. 63

A political scientist might fault the logic of Ralph Abernathy's assertions; few among his black audience would deny their profound truth.

II. THE BIRMINGHAM CAMPAIGN

Fred L. Shuttlesworth and the ACMHR

Ever since the NAACP had been outlawed by the state of Alabama in 1956, the Rev. Fred L. Shuttlesworth had fought an almost single-handed battle against the forces of white supremacy in Birmingham. His organization, the Alabama Christian Movement for Human Rights, inspired by the Montgomery Improvement Association, filed suits to integrate the city's government, schools, and buses, but the city responded by repealing the appropriate segregation laws while maintaining an unyielding policy of de facto segregation.[64] Shuttlesworth and his supporters found themselves subjected to a campaign of intimidation, harassment, and physical violence. Shuttlesworth had his bed blown up from under him, and he was stabbed while attempting to personally integrate one of the city's schools.[65] False fire alarms were sounded during ACMHR meetings, and participants found their cars had parking-tickets attached to them.[66] The Rev. Charles Billups, one of Shuttlesworth's lieutenants, was chain-whipped; another black man was castrated by the Ku Klux Klan.[67] Bomb attacks against black churches and the homes of black leaders were commonplace.[68]

The ACMHR met this repression with an escalation of its struggle. A bus boycott was launched, and during 1960 and 1961, a battery of suits was filed to integrate

the city's public accommodations.[69] However, in December 1961 the city closed its parks, playgrounds, and golf-courses, rather than comply with a federal court order to integrate them.[70] Once again, the ACMHR widened its attack and, in March 1962, it was given a powerful boost when the students of Miles College initiated a boycott of Birmingham's white shops. The students were seeking integrated lunch-counters, toilets and drinking-fountains; the employment of black clerks and salesmen; and the general upgrading of black employees.[71] The boycott was effective; it reduced the level of business of some white stores by as much as forty per cent and, although there were no immediate gains, it involved the whole of the black community in the movement.[72]

Still, however, the city refused to negotiate, and the merchants were afraid to act without the support of Birmingham's political leaders. The latter, for their part, simply replied to the boycott tit for tat. In relinquishing Birmingham's share in the federal food surplus programme, said Mayor Arthur Hanes, the city was "demonstrating to the Negro community who their real friends and benefactors are." If the black population continued to support the likes of Shuttlesworth, "let these leaders feed them."[73] After more than five years of campaigning, the ACMHR had barely dented the city's monolithic structure of segregation; Birmingham remained "the worst city in the world besides Johannesburg, South Africa."[74]

Planning "Project C."

It was audacious of the SCLC to stage a campaign of mass nonviolent direct action in Birmingham. In 1961, the Civil Rights Commission had warned that "Racial prejudices are incredibly tense in Birmingham. Until local leaders make a concerted effort to control these feelings, the slightest provocation can be expected to unleash acts of violence." Three weeks after the writing of this report, the Freedom Riders were mobbed and beaten.[75] But the danger of violence was not only from the white community. The black population, having known nothing but white repression, would find it difficult to accept and understand nonviolence. "Birmingham was not a nonviolent city," Andrew Young remembered.

> Birmingham was probably the most violent city in America, and every black family had an arsenal. To talk in terms of nonviolence . . . folks would look at you like you were crazy because they had been bombing black homes. They had been beating up black people and the blacks thought that there was no alternative for them but to kill or be killed. 76

In choosing Birmingham, the SCLC was taking the risk of uncontrollable violence; months of patient work would be needed to persuade the black population that violence was tactically unwise.

At a three-day strategy session at the Dorchester Institute in September 1962, the SCLC analyzed the failures of the Albany campaign, and mapped the tactics of the Birmingham struggle.[77] They made three important

tactical decisions. Firstly, they made contingency plans. The possible reactions of the federal, state, and city governments, as well as those of the white business community had to be anticipated. Secondly, the SCLC decided to delineate limited but attainable goals at the very outset of the campaign. Given the character of the city's white politicians, and given the effectiveness of the existing economic boycott, it was decided to look for concessions from, first and foremost, the business community. The indefinite withdrawal of $4 million of business each week would be a powerful incentive for white shops to desegregate their lunch-counters, toilets, and drinking-fountains; and for the white business community as a whole to hire and upgrade black employees on a non-discriminatory basis.[78]

The third tactical decision made by the SCLC staff concerned the legal stance of the civil rights movement. King and his aides realized that they would probably be confronted with police repression and legal obstruction in Birmingham. These obstacles had destroyed the Albany campaign. However, it was decided that nothing would be allowed to halt the momentum of the Birmingham campaign once it had got underway. King realized that it was not literally possible to "fill the jails;" the mass demonstration was a weapon that had to be used sparingly, and with the utmost care.[79] If utilized too soon, the ensuing mass arrests would break (as they had done in

Albany) the morale of the movement's supporters, and thus torpedo the campaign before it had had time to "build up steam." The giant demonstration was a tactic to be used at exactly the right psychological moment, when an atmosphere of crisis and tension had been slowly fomented. The Birmingham campaign would begin with small sit-ins. Gradually, as police repression solidified the support of the black community, demonstrations would become larger and more frequent. The slow build-up was important: "By rationing our energies in this manner, we would help toward the . . . drama of a growing campaign."[80] The skilful and carefully-timed use of a set of differentiated tactics would be one of the keys to a success in Birmingham.

Fred Shuttlesworth liked to say that it was an unwritten rule in Alabama that "if the mobs don't stop you, the police can; and if the police don't, then the courts will."[81] The court injunction was one of the most effective weapons in the segregationists' arsenal, a "pseudo-legal way of breaking the back of legitimate moral protest."[82] It was little comfort to know that the Supreme Court would probably nullify a local court order enjoining peaceful demonstrations: it might take years for such a case to reach the highest judicial tribunal in the land. The state of Alabama, moreover, was notorious for delaying action

on civil rights cases.[83] Its ban on the NAACP, for example, issued in 1956, was not overturned until 1965. Meanwhile an injunction of a state court--even if blatantly unconstitutional--was subject to contempt of court.[84] Nor was the problem confined to local courts: in Albany it had been a federal judge (a segregationist appointee of President Kennedy) who had enjoined the movement there. King, to his bitter regret, decided to obey the injunction, and the Albany movement subsequently collapsed.[85]

The problem of court injunctions presented the SCLC, and King in particular, with a difficult dilemma. As Andrew Young explained: "Dr. King felt that the federal courts were our only real ally nationally. . . . Breaking a federal court injunction in Albany was a slap in the face of the federal courts that he couldn't bring himself to make."[86] Nevertheless, during the planning for the Birmingham campaign, it was decided that the SCLC would refuse to comply with a hostile injunction--even a federal one.[87]

Apart from these tactical considerations, the mobilizing of financial, legal, and political support was a crucial aspect of the planning for Birmingham. A battery of civil rights lawyers began preparing for the court battles ahead.[88] In New York, Harry Belafonte spent a hectic three weeks raising bail money, as well as cultivating general support for the forthcoming

campaign.[89] King himself collected funds, extracted pledges of support from the major civil rights organizations, and toured the country explaining the nature of the crisis confronting the civil rights movement and the nation.[90]

Meanwhile, in Birmingham itself, King, Ralph Abernathy, and Wyatt T. Walker met with Fred Shuttlesworth to plan the campaign, and endeavoured to win the support of the more skeptical members of the ACMHR board.[91] It was decided to commence the campaign at the beginning of March 1963, six weeks before the busy Easter shopping season. In January, a team of SCLC field workers led by Wyatt Walker began making detailed plans for the demonstrations. Familiarizing himself with the geography of the downtown business section, as well as the layout of particular shops, Walker was able to map out alternative routes for demonstrations, and ascertain the most vulnerable targets for sit-ins and boycotts.[92] "By January," Walker recalled, "we had a thick file and a day-by-day plan of action."[93] "Project C" (as the Birmingham struggle was designated) was the most thoroughly planned campaign in the history of the civil rights movement.

Stage I: April 3 to April 10

On April 3, 1963, "Twenty well-dressed Negroes, their timing apparehtly synchronized, staged sit-in demonstrations at downtown Birmingham stores. Four were

arrested."[94] Such was the quiet and undramatic beginning of the campaign. A full month was to pass, however, before King and the SCLC were able to stage mass demonstrations. This slow start was partly deliberate, but it also reflected the apathy and disunity of the city's black population. Although the SCLC had been invited to Birmingham by Shuttlesworth and the ACMHR, King and his aides were extremely sensitive to the charge that they were interfering "outsiders". For this reason, they delayed the campaign twice during the political turmoil of the mayoralty election; first for the election of March 5, and then for the runoff on April 2 between Albert Boutwell and Eugene T. "Bull" Connor. Not wishing to provide Connor with racist propoganda, all of the SCLC staff left the city until the runoff election had been completed.[95]

These delays weakened the opening stage of the campaign. The SCLC lost contact with the cadre of 250 volunteers who had been recruited by Walker in January and February: when the SCLC returned to the city, only sixty-five came forward.[96] Worse still, there was considerable opposition within the black community to a direct action campaign and, as Walker explained, "We had no opportunity to come in and meet with local groups, for fear of influencing the election. We had to start cold."[97] That there was hostility toward the SCLC was later admitted by King, and it was apparent

in the paucity of volunteers for demonstrations: after the first week of the campaign, only 150 had been arrested.[98] Several prominent black leaders, including Dr. J.L. Ware (President of the Baptist Ministers Conference), A.G. Gaston (Birmingham's richest and most influential black businessman), and Lucius H. Pitts (President of Miles College) opposed the timing of the SCLC's campaign on the grounds that the incoming Boutwell administration should be given a fair chance to act.[99] Other black leaders resented not having been informed of the SCLC's plans. The black newspaper The Birmingham World, made no secret of its anger at the "non-responsible, the non-attached, and the non-program 'leader.'"[100] Direct action, claimed the World, was "both wasteful and worthless;" it was time for the responsible "hometown leadership" to reassert itself.[101]

Faced with such opposition, King delayed going to jail, and embarked upon "a whirlwind campaign . . . to mobilize every key person and group behind our movement."[102] Many of the arguments later used in Letter From Birmingham City Jail (and directed at whites), were rehearsed in these talks for blacks: the absurdity of labelling the SCLC "outsiders," the importance of black unity, the necessity for nonviolent pressure and, above all, the need for a socially relevant ministry:

> There are some preachers in Birmingham who are not with this movement. I'm tired of preachers riding around in big cars, living in fine homes, but not willing to take part in the fight. . . . If you can't stand up with your people, you are not fit to be a preacher. 103

Dividing his time between students, businessmen, ministers, and ordinary citizens, King managed to "transform the fears and misunderstanding . . . . into faith and enthusiasm." [104] The first stage of the campaign was over; a massive escalation was soon to begin.

Stage II: The Critical Period: April 12 to May 1

On April 10, the City of Birmingham was granted a temporary restraining order by a state circuit court. It enjoined King and 137 others from taking part in demonstrations or other forms of public protest. Two days later, King and Ralph Abernathy were arrested while leading a march; they spent eight days in the Birmingham city jail.[105]

King's decision to defy the injunction prevented the movement from collapse. It did not, however, solve any of its larger tactical problems. Negotiations with the white business community (represented by a sub-committee of the Birmingham Chamber of Commerce) commenced on April 25; informal contact had been established soon after King's arrests through the good offices of the Alabama Commission on Human Relations.[106] But, after three weeks of demonstrations, "we were still

beating our heads against the brick wall of the city officials' stubborn resolve to maintain the status quo," wrote King.[107] Moreover, King's jailing had done nothing to overcome the passivity of the federal government: Assistant Attorney General Burke Marshal, aware that King was attempting to exert pressure, insisted that the Justice Department was powerless to intervene.[108] The government's determination to preserve its "neutrality" boded ill for the movement. As the Chicago Defender pointed out, "the federal government also remained out of the Albany situation where . . . the only tangible gain Negroes made was desegregation of the public library."[109] The demonstrations had also thus far failed to gain sympathetic support from the national press. Time, Newsweek, and the Washington Post all strongly criticized the timing of King's campaign: by going in before the Boutwell administration had had a chance to act, King was making "Bull" Connor seem indispensable.[110] "The words 'bad timing' came to be ghosts haunting our every move in Birmingham," wrote King.[111]

From the time of King's arrest, to the day of his trial on April 26, no large demonstrations were held, and the movement turned its energies to sit-ins, kneel-ins, and a voter registration drive led by James Bevel.[112] Out of jail, King recognized that the stalemate could only be overcome by an escalation of pressure: now was the time to fill the jails. Since the start of the

campaign, an SCLC Leadership Training Committee (which included James Bevel, Andrew Young, James Lawson, Diane Nash Bevel, and Dorothy Cotton) had been recruiting and training volunteers for demonstrating and going to jail.[113] But there never seemed to be enough of them, and there was an increasing reliance on children for demonstrations. At the end of April, the staff of the SCLC began visiting Birmingham's black colleges and high schools to recruit young people in greater numbers. Yet King was reluctant to use children on a large scale. It was a tactic fraught with danger, and was certain to attract strong outside criticism. "Martin was about the most indecisive man I've ever seen," recalled civil rights lawyer William Kunstler. His dilemma was only solved when James Bevel "just went out and organized the kids into a demonstration."[114]

The tactics of nonviolent direct action were now developed to a new, higher level. "I don't play," Bevel warned, "and when I say I'm going to fill up the jails, I mean I'm going to fill up the jails."[115] With the help of the Rev. Charles Billups of the ACMHR, and Isaac Reynolds of CORE, Bevel was able to carry out that threat, thereby bringing about the kind of confrontation that the SCLC had been seeking for a month.[116]

Stage III: "D-Day" and the Emergence of a Settlement

As April turned into May, thousands of black school-children received a pamphlet advising them that

"Thursday, May 2, is D-Day." The recipients of this cryptic message already knew what it meant and, on the appointed day, nearly one thousand children, many not yet in their teens, were arrested on a demonstration that "obviously had been planned down to the last detail."[117] During the next five days, the demonstrations grew in size and intensity until, by May 7, the total number of arrests numbered three thousand.[118]

Despite Robert Kennedy's assertion that "an injured, maimed, or dead child is a price that none of us can afford to pay," the use of the children was the turning-point of the campaign.[119] Unable to arrest all of the demonstrators, Connor began, on May 3, to disperse them with dogs and fire-hoses.[120] This escalation of police repression did not work. Not only did it arouse moral indignation throughout the North (and the rest of the world outside southern Africa), it also provoked a black response that bordered on the edge of violence, thus increasing the atmosphere of tension and crisis in Birmingham itself. Pressure for a settlement was increased from both within and without; both types of pressure were essential if a successful accord were to be reached.

Dogs and fire-hoses failed to stop the demonstrations. Blacks continued to march and, on May 5, when the Rev. Charles Billups led 2,000 on a prayer pilgrimage to the city jail, the police made no attempt to stop them. The Chicago Defender considered this march "the

closest thing to a victory the Negro community had won;" for King it was "one of the most fantastic events of the Birmingham story," with a touch of the miraculous about it.[121] The sagging morale of the police was further highlighted by the climatic demonstrations of May 6 and 7. On the first day, one thousand blacks, mostly children, marched--almost danced--out of the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church straight into police paddy-wagons, which then took them straight to jail.[122] On the morning of May 7, six hundred students created chaos in the Birmingham Police Department by breaking through the police cordon and marching downtown, where they "turned the busy noon rush hour into a complete state of confusion."[123] Driven back to the church, they were joined by at least three thousand others in Kelley-Ingram park, where they were surrounded by the police and knocked down by fire-hoses.[124] The police, however, failed to intimidate the demonstrators. Only fifty arrests were made, and some blacks (especially bystanders who had merged in with the demonstration) retaliated by throwing bricks and bottles.[125]

The events of May 7 were profoundly disturbing to the white businessmen. As their negotiators broke up for lunch, "an extraordinary sight met their eyes" as they stepped into the street: they saw "Negroes on the sidewalks, in the streets, standing, sitting in the aisles of downtown stores," all the while singing

freedom songs.[126] It was little wonder that when Sheriff Melvin Bailey told the white negotiators that the local police force was "strained to the utmost of capacity," their attitude toward the talks was "warmer than at any previous session."[127]

The only alternative to a settlement was a massive increase in police repression. But Connor's use of dogs and fire-hoses had already backfired. It had united the black community as never before; early doubters such as A.G. Gaston now recognized that "the demonstrations gave us a wedge we never had before to use at the bargaining table."[128] Just as important, the police violence had mobilized liberal opinion and increased the pressure for federal intervention. On May 4, Robert Kennedy dispatched Assistant Attorney General Burke Marshall to Birmingham in order to facilitate the negotiations, and senior members of the Kennedy administration worked to persuade the white businessmen to accept the movement's minimum demands.[129] The chairman of United States Steel instructed the head of the Tennessee Iron and Coal Company (the biggest of Birmingham's "Big Mules") to push more energetically for a settlement.[130] At last, the combination of internal and external pressure was beginning to pay off. The white businessmen were left with no way out. Increased repression would mean martial law, enforced by the Alabama National Guard, under the direct command of Governor George

Wallace. Six hundred state troopers had already been sent to the city, at the request of the outgoing Mayor. They were commanded by Albert J. Lingo, a close associate of both George Wallace and "Bull" Connor. He was also a man who believed in the traditional Southern way of dealing with blacks: crude, brutal repression. Even Birmingham's police chief found Lingo's methods extreme; to hand over law enforcement in Birmingham to the state troopers would simply hasten federal intervention.[131]

With this possibility in mind, the Senior Citizens' Committee came to an agreement. On May 10, announcing the terms, King voiced his hope that "this metropolis will truly become a magic city again, this time filled with the beautiful magic of a new brotherhood where men are free to know, respect and love each other."[132]

The Significance of the Birmingham Campaign.

King's hope was not to be fulfilled. The May 10 accord represented a major de-escalation of the movement's demands.[133] Even so, the Senior Citizens' Committee could not bring itself to honour it. Its version of the agreement provided for the desegregation of only five lunch-counters, and the hiring of a single black clerk.[134] The city refused to appoint a black policeman, and only a handful of lunch-counters were integrated.[135]

By autumn, wrote King, "the small beginnings of good will seemed to whither." At the SCLC's annual conference, King threatened a new campaign and, in October, the ACMHR resumed demonstrations, regarding the May 10 accord as having been broken. These demonstrations lasted for a year, but it was only with the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act that Birmingham's public accommodations were desegregated.[136]

King admitted that the immediate results of the Birmingham campaign were disappointing. Yet, he insisted, these results were a "towering achievement" considering the character of Birmingham.[137] The real significance of the campaign, however, was located elsewhere: in the development of the SCLC and the maturation of nonviolent direct action; in its inspirational effect upon the rest of the civil rights movement; and in its influence in changing the civil rights policy of the federal government.

The techniques pioneered in Albany were perfected in Birmingham; there, the SCLC learned "how to mobilize the people in masses."[138] Meticulous planning, flexible tactics, and a determination to literally "fill the jails" raised nonviolent direct action "to a measurable maturity we had not seen before."[139] In the opinion of one observer, the Birmingham campaign was "the best-organized and most highly-disciplined action ever mounted by Negroes."[140] For the first time, the SCLC

staff functioned effectively as a team, each member with his or her own function. James Bevel, Bernard Lee, and Dorothy Cotten organized students and children; Andrew Young acted as the SCLC's chief negotiator; and Wyatt Walker served as a behind-the-scenes planner and director. As Andrew Young pointed out, Birmingham was no miracle, "it was a lot of hard work."[141]

"When the Southern Christian Leadership Conference went into Birmingham," wrote King, "it was determined to change that city."[142] The campaign was planned and conducted with a degree of militancy that was new to the SCLC. Confrontation (as expressed in the campaign's code name, "Project C") was the modus operandi; the expressed purpose was to create a "crisis-packed" situation and, to reach that circumstance, King was willing to take Birmingham "to the edge of total social disorder."[143] The overall strategy of the campaign was equally audacious. King's refusal to postpone the demonstrations for a fourth time was based on more than the reason he gave to Robert Kennedy ("Negroes had been waiting for 200 years and didn't want to wait any longer").[144] The timing of the campaign, much criticized, was deliberate. After the April 2 mayoralty runoff election, Birmingham was between two administrations. By commencing the demonstrations while "Bull" Connor was still Commissioner of Public Safety, the SCLC, far from making Connor appear indispensable, drew out police violence which, as well as providing

the movement with valuable propaganda, further exacerbated the division within the white leadership. The following conversation between Birmingham Police Chief Jamie Moore and Albert J. Lingo of the Alabama National Guard (recorded by Michael Dorman on the night of May 12), graphically illustrated this division:

> Moore urged Lingo . . . to withdraw, "If you'd leave, Mr. Lingo, I'd appreciate it," he said. Lingo snapped: "I'm not going to leave. I've been sent here by the Governor, and I'm going to stay." Moore appealed: "Those guns are not needed. Will you please put them up? Somebody's going to get killed." "You're damned right it'll get somebody killed," Lingo boomed.145

As Vincent Harding, one of the SCLC's negotiators, pointed out, "A better time for the demonstrations could not have been chosen." With the city's politicians bitterly divided, "there was no government to hide behind, and the economic and civic leaders were simply forced to move forward."[146]

Even those who were skeptical about the immediate, local achievements of the campaign, recognized Birmingham's enormous impact upon the civil rights movement as a whole. "With new hope born of Birmingham, Negroes exploded into the streets of America," wrote Lerone Bennett.[147] Segregation had been cracked, however slightly, in a major Deep South city. The effect was profound: flagging campaigns were revived, and new ones were sparked off. By the end of 1963, the South had experienced 930 demonstrations in 115 cities, with over 20,000 arrests; and some measure of desegregation was

achieved in 186 cities.[148] "Perhaps all this . . . might have come about even if there had not been a Birmingham crisis," wrote Michael Dorman. "But, as things worked out, the Birmingham crisis seemed to have been the catalyst that sent the tide of integration activities sweeping across the land."[149]

The impact of Birmingham could also be seen in other ways. A movement's single demand was replaced by several; a piecemeal approach to desegregation gave way to a frontal assault against its every manifestation. As one official of CORE admitted, "Birmingham brought a drastic revision in our thinking. You can nibble away at the surface for a thousand years and not get anywhere."[150] Across-the-board integration became the new goal and, as in Birmingham, economic demands, such as the hiring and upgrading of black employees, became a prominent feature of the "package deal"[151]

One hundred years after Emancipation, "Negroes are still seeking an effective alliance with the Federal government to make their freedom a reality," wrote King in 1962.[152] The federal government had refused to intervene in the Albany crisis and, at a meeting in January 1963, the Kennedys told King that they had no plans for proposing major civil rights legislation in the immediate future. "Martin was very disappointed," Coretta remembered, and he frankly told the President that he was expecting federal support in the forthcoming campaign.[153]

The role of the federal government in procuring a settlement in Birmingham was crucial and, just as important, the government assumed the role of the agreement's guarantor. After the bombings of May 12, when it appeared that Wallace would use the ensuing black riot as an excuse to impose martial law and destroy the pact, Kennedy affirmed that "the Birmingham agreement was and is a just accord," and that, if necessary, the federal government would assume direct responsibility for policing the city by federalizing the Alabama National Guard.[154] A month later, Kennedy appeared on television to announce his intention to introduce a civil rights bill:

> The events of Birmingham and elsewhere have so increased the desires for equality that no city or state or legislative body can prudently choose to ignore them. . . . We face, therefore, a moral crisis as a country and a people. It cannot be met by repressive police action. . . . It is a time to act in the Congress, in your state and local legislative body and, above all, in all of our daily lives.[155]

In Birmingham, the SCLC had transformed nonviolent direct action, from a naïve and unrealistic appeal to the conscience of the oppressor, into an effective instrument of power.

CHAPTER IV

THE ASSAULT ON WHITE SUPREMACY: THE SCLC FROM SAVANNAH TO SELMA

I. THE MINOR CAMPAIGNS

The Supportive Role of the SCLC

The surge of direct action that occurred after Birmingham was unforeseen and unplanned. Nevertheless, as Wyatt Walker put it, "Finally we opened our eyes and the white man all over the South is catching hell."[1] During the summer of 1963, King and the SCLC led, fomented, or merely encouraged half a dozen local movements that had sprung up in the wake of Birmingham. Always, the message was the same: march, demonstrate, stay in the streets, "go down there and fill the jail."[2] Even though "we hear . . . from the lips of some of the highest officials in the land that we ought to stop," King would say, constant pressure was the only way to convince whites that segregation had had its day.[3]

Many of the 1963 campaigns achieved little in terms of immediate results. In Danville, Virginia, and Gadsden, Alabama, where demonstrations were answered with unalloyed repression, King admitted that "these engagements were . . . defeats for the movement." Even the more successful movements, such as Savannah, represented only partial victories.[4] Even so, King insisted that the crushing defeats and token victories had a total impact

that defied precise quantification: "Seen in perspective, the summer of 1963 was historic because it witnessed the first offensive in history launched by Negroes along a broad front."[5]

The overall achievement of the direct action campaigns could not be measured merely in terms of the number of public accommodations that were integrated. Clearly, nonviolent demonstrations lacked sufficient coercive power to bring about significant change by themselves. Their real importance was that they hastened federal intervention and national civil rights legislation by "the successful dramatization, before a national audience, of the injustice and inhumanity of the Jim Crow system."[6]

The Savannah Campaign

The Savannah campaign, conducted by the Chatham County Crusade for Voters, led by Hosea Williams, was the most successful application of Birmingham-style tactics. The failure of early negotiations pinpointed the problem with a piecemeal approach toward integration: "certain restaurants refused to desegregate because of their competition," said Williams. "The hotels refused because of the restaurants. The motels refused because of the hotels. The theaters refused to go it alone."7 As a result, the CCCV demanded complete, across-the-board desegregation; and the strategy of its campaign was unrelenting direct action because, as Andrew Young put it, "the white folks don't pay any attention to us

unless we're on the streets."[8]

Savannah already possessed one of the South's most successful civil rights movements. The city was the first in Georgia to integrate its lunch-counters. By the time of the Birmingham campaign, the buses, toilets, public libraries, and water-fountains had been desegregated; blacks had been appointed to all of the city's boards; the number of black policemen was increased from seventeen to thirty; and the city had agreed to hire black firemen and bus drivers.[9] Meanwhile, the CCCV had conducted one of the most productive voter registration drives in the Deep South.[10]

These gains were impressive, but they did not destroy the deep-seated white resistance to complete desegregation. Many whites still harboured the illusion that Savannah's black population was basically content: as Judge Victor Mullings told Hosea Williams, "If you study the history of Georgia, you'll find that . . . Savannah has had very little racial strife. . . . Both races, by and large, have got along through the years."[11] The Savannah campaign, launched in June 1963, after three white cinemas had reneged on a desegregation agreement, was intended to destroy this illusion once and for all, and to demonstrate that the races could only "get along" in the future if the white business and political community made a conscious, collective decision to sweep away every form of segregation.

The influence of the Birmingham campaign was clearly reflected in the use of the mass demonstration, and in the belief that chronic social disorder was the only way to induce the white authorities to come to terms. The Savannah demonstrations matched those of Birmingham in scale. Within four days of the campaign's commencement, more than two hundred blacks had been arrested.[12] By June 11, demonstrations were being held in both the afternoon and the evening, attracting approximately 1,000 and 3,000 people.[13] During the next month, such demonstrations were staged each day, with the afternoon crowds assembled by Ben Van Clarke and addressed by Hosea Williams during his lunch hour.[14]

After two weeks of marches, the city resorted to more violent methods. On June 19, reinforced by fifty Georgia state troopers, the police used tear-gas and mass arrests to disperse a midnight demonstration.[15] Such tactics, however, only served to unify the black leadership, solidify popular support for the movement, and provoke the demonstrators into increasingly violent reactions. As the Savannah Morning News noted, in a classic understatement, "the mood of the demonstrators was getting more serious."[16] Having failed to forcibly suppress the marches, the city then made a tactical blunder of the first magnitude by arresting Hosea Williams under an obscure "good behaviour" warrant--a law that had last been used in slavery days.[17] Blacks were incensed

by this move, and their anger was exacerbated when they learnt that Williams's bond was set at $30,000, and then upped to $70,000.[18]

The events that followed Williams' arrest, Newsweek observed, showed "what happens when an angry rank-and-file loses the restraints of Negro leadership."[19] The detention of Williams not only invigorated the nightly marches, but also strained the nonviolent discipline of the marchers. On July 10, they submitted to tear-gas and fire-hoses; the following day they responded to the same treatment by stoning cars, breaking windows, and lighting fires.[20] As in Birmingham, and in the same way, a "crisis-packed" situation had been reached.

After the minor riot of July 11, James Bevel, announcing a temporary cessation of the demonstrations, admonished his listeners that "When a Negro throws a bottle in Savannah, he endangers the whole movement."[21] Yet, as David Lewis observed of Birmingham's May 7 riot, such violence, while "deplorable from the optic of non-violent passive resistance . . . was probably indispensable" for pressuring white leaders to give way to the movement's demands.[22] Massive demonstrations, the favourite weapon of the SCLC, had an inherent risk of violence. The night march, the heavy reliance upon untrained juveniles, and the willingness to bring about a confrontation with the forces of "law and order" increased the likelihood of a violent white reaction, and a similar black counter-reaction.

It was a hallmark of the SCLC that it was prepared to take this risk, knowing that negotiations without demonstrations ("pressureless persuasion") were time-wasting and ineffective. "We made two mistakes," said Williams after the collapse of some early talks. "We made a mistake each time we stopped the demonstrations."[23] The NAACP, on the other hand, opposed the use of night marches, and deplored William's "rabble-rousing" style of oratory: although they attracted thousands who would not otherwise have participated in the movement, the larger the demonstration, the more difficult to maintain nonviolent discipline.[24] Nevertheless, although the CCCV's tactics engendered heated opposition from the more conservative black leaders, the violence of the police, and the incarceration of Williams rallied the black community around the goals of the campaign. Williams's rival in the NAACP, W.W. Law, protested the presence of the state troopers; and the conservative black ministry, the Negro Interdenominational Ministers' Alliance, called for "total integration"--even as it was trying to prevent King from speaking by denying him the use of a church.[25] In the tense atmosphere following the violence of mid-July, a comprehensive desegregation agreement emerged, with a group of white clergymen playing a major role in the negotiations.[26]

In Birmingham, the SCLC had eclipsed the local organization, the ACMHR, but in Savannah it fulfilled a secondary, supportive function. The Conference imported

demonstrators from Birmingham; sent Dorothy Cotten to teach nonviolence; and provided bail money and funds for voter registration.[27] When Hosea Williams was jailed, Andrew Young, James Bevel, and John Gibson filled the resulting leadership vacuum, as well as taking a leading role in the talks that led to the desegregation agreement.[28] Although King had little to do with the Savannah campaign, the SCLC, as an organization, proved capable of making a valuable contribution.

The Danville Campaign

In 1962, impatient with the caution of the NAACP, a group of black leaders formed the Danville Christian Progressive Association, and affiliated it with the SCLC. In October, the DCPA filed an omnibus integration suit with the U.S. District Court and, after Birmingham, inaugurated a direct action campaign to back it up.[29] The white authorities answered with a multi-faceted counter-campaign which included the violent dispersal of demonstrations; ordinances and court injunctions forbidding direct action; indictment of the movement's leaders; and an adamant refusal to negotiate.

After a week of peaceful marches, further demonstrations were enjoined, and the leaders of the DCPA were charged by a local (all-white) grand jury with "contributing to the delinquency of minors."[30] The police now had tacit permission to employ more forceful methods and, on June 10, reinforced by the Virginia State

Police, they broke up a prayer vigil with "hoses, tear-gas, and sawed-off baseball bats." All but three of the demonstrators needed medical treatment. On an earlier march, thirty-eight had been arrested, the remainder dispersed with fire-hoses.[31] That such police violence was not merely a temporary aberration but a deliberate policy, was made clear three days later, when similar treatment was meted out to a group that staged a sit-in at city hall.[32]

During the next month and a half, the city endeavoured to break the movement with blunderbuss legal repression. Two new city ordinances were passed, one banning marches, the other limiting picketing to six people; and on August 2, a federal judge made the city's injunction permanent.[33] On June 21, the movement's entire leadership, which included workers from SNCC, CORE, and the SCLC, was indicted, under Virginia's 1859 "John Brown" statute, for inciting blacks "to acts of violence and war against the white population."[34] Three of those indicted were dragged from a Baptist church, where they had sought refuge.[35]

On June 17, the trial of those charged with violating the injunction against demonstrations began. The presiding judge not only "rimmed the courtroom with forty armed troopers and police," but also wore (as did nearly every city official) "conspicuous side arms."[36] The trial--even by Southern standards--was a travesty of justice.

"The lawyers had no information which case would be brought to trial when," wrote Sally Belfrage, "and were racing against the inevitable time of their own arrest as well."[37] (Civil rights lawyer Len Holt was indicted three days later.)[38] Confronted by this legal offensive (which, apart from the legal expenses, cost $200,000 in bail money), the Danville movement crumbled. "The police terror was so complete," wrote Len Holt, "that people could no longer be brought to demonstrate."[39]

When SCLC affiliates embarked on direct action campaigns, they often provoked opposition from more moderate and conservative black leaders. In Danville, this split was especially acute, and it was deftly exploited by the white authorities. Disunity stemmed not only from the NAACP's disapproval of demonstrations, but also from a division within the DCPA itself over the merits of direct action, with its president, the Rev. L.W.Chase, siding with the NAACP.[40] The city lost no opportunity to take advantage of Chase's disagreements with the other officers of the DCPA. Chase was excepted from the June 6 injunction and, when he led a demonstration five days later, the police did not interfere.[41] These tactics failed to induce a permanent split within the ranks of the DCPA (the police violence of June 10 "solidified the fragmented Negro leadership"), but the NAACP continued to oppose the demonstrations, and deplored what it considered to be unwarranted interference by outside civil rights organizations.[42] When whites were united

in their determination to preserve the status quo, this kind of black disunity was crippling.

The SCLC's role in the Danville campaign was ambiguous and unsatisfactory. On the one hand, there was "unlimited confidence in King. . . . he was the unseen ghost in every conference; he was the giver of all solutions;" on the other hand, King never became intimately involved in the Danville struggle.[43] In May, he spoke to a meeting of 2,500, and urged them to take to the streets.[44] However, although he promised to return on July 3, Fred Shuttlesworth was sent in his stead.[45] King's reluctance to assume the overall leadership of the campaign was due, in part, to his ambiguous attitude toward court injunctions. While he was perfectly willing to break state or local restraining orders, he was loathe to violate a federal court order. Thus when he returned to Danville on July 11, and encouraged the demonstrations by saying "I have so many injunctions that I don't even look at them anymore," he did not take part in the next day's march.[46] Similarly, a month later, while proclaiming that "I was enjoined when I was born a Negro," he regretted that he was unable to stay in Danville.[47] Although the SCLC played its part in the campaign, sending Milton Reid, Herbert Coulton, and Wyatt Walker, the principal source of outside help was SNCC, which had up to fifteen field workers in Danville, prominent among whom were Bob Zellner, Daniel Foss, and Avon Rollins.[48]

As with so many of its campaigns, SNCC, unlike the SCLC, was unable to focus national attention upon the situation in Danville and, without King's presence, its effort to revive demonstrations in July quickly failed.[49] In June, King had promised to send a "nonviolent task force" to the city; the promise was repeated in October and November. King returned twice to Danville in November, vowing that "We mean business."[50] The threatened onslaught of direct action, however, failed to materialize. With a staff of only sixty, and with half a dozen other local situations to contend with, it was inevitable that the SCLC spread itself too thinly. Nevertheless, as William Robert Miller pointed out, although

> Danville's expectations . . . testified to an undue dependence on the charismatic figure of King . . . neither King nor his Atlanta staff did anything to counter these expectations. . . . When local movements built themselves around King, they let themselves in for a powerful vacuum in his absence.[51]

The campaign was by no means an unmitigated failure. In November, most of the City Council met the leaders of the DCPA and the NAACP, and agreed to write a city fair hiring policy.[52] By early 1964, Danville had hired one black policeman and two social workers, and passed a fair employment law (the first in the South). In addition, the two segregated textile unions were merged; a dozen lunch-counters were opened to blacks; and the black electorate was doubled, after a voter registration campaign conducted with the help of the SCLC's

Herbert Coulton.[53] Integration in Danville was purely token but, in a city that had removed all the chairs from its public library in order to maintain "separation" of the races, it was no small victory.

The St. Augustine Campaign and the problem of White Vigilantism

St. Augustine was the SCLC's "last great demonstration campaign against legally supported segregation of public accommodations."[54] It had all the usual elements. The demand was the now standard "package": fair employment in city government; the integration of public accommodations; the dropping of charges against arrested demonstrators; and the establishment of a bi-racial commission.[55] The white response to these demands was also routine: refusal to negotiate; complaints about "outside agitators"; and mass arrests coupled with court injunctions against demonstrations. St. Augustine's first taste of direct action was a sit-in campaign in the summer of 1963. Eighty arrests were made; sit-inners were ejected by police with dogs and electric cattle-prods; and four juveniles were sent to reform school for six months.[56]

Such treatment was not unusual in the Deep South. What set St. Augustine apart was not the severity with which the civil rights movement was crushed, but the prominent role of white vigilantes in maintaining white supremacy. On July 1, 1963, the home of Dr. Robert Hayling, branch president of the NAACP, was blasted by

shotgun fire, and the next month it was bombed.[57] In September, Hayling and three companions were beaten during a Ku Klux Klan rally, which they had unwisely attempted to observe. Early in 1964, Hayling's home was again shot at. By this time, white attacks had become common, and Hayling and his companions made no secret of their readiness to retaliate.[58]

When his life was first threatened, Hayling sought protection from the F.B.I.: "I was new to the civil rights movement, and you can imagine my shock when they referred me to the local police!"[59] He might well have indulged in an ironic laugh. The local sheriff, L.O. Davis, was famous for confining arrested demonstrators in an open stockade that was dubbed "the sweat-box." Several of his deputies were members of the Ancient City Gun Club, a Klan-type organization that ran armed motor patrols. The Ancient City Gun Club was headed by Holstead "Hoss" Manucey, who was not coy about describing the club's purpose: "My boys are here to fight niggers." Manucey was also a deputy sheriff.[60]

Brazen vigilantism, openly aided and abetted by the police, and silently tolerated by the white politicians presented an especially difficult challenge to the SCLC. In Birmingham, white businessmen had been the SCLC's main target and, under duress, they had nudged the city toward desegregation. In St. Augustine, on the other hand, the owners of hotels, motels, and restaurants (the

potential "moderates") were "literally, physically afraid."[61] They would not defy "Manucey's raiders" unless the two most influential businessmen, banker H.E. Wolfe and Dr. Haygood Norris, set an example. But they did little or nothing to restrain the vigilantes. Wolfe turned down a request from President Johnson (delivered by Senator George Smathers) to serve as a "federal mediator."[62] The most that he and the other businessmen would do was promise compliance with the Civil Rights Bill, when it was finally passed.[63] With Manucey's men on the loose, such a promise was worthless.

The St. Augustine campaign was intended to provide continuing pressure for the passage of the Bill, as well as a test of its enforcement. Demonstrations, argued King, would "unearth the corrupt police state methods" that threatened the reality of reform.[64] The strategy of the SCLC was to induce the federal government to apply economic sanctions against the city and, if this failed, to employ federal marshals, as President Kennedy had done in Oxford, Mississippi. St. Augustine was to receive a federal grant of $350,000 for its quadricentennial celebrations; the SCLC intended to make that grant a political embarrassment for the Johnson administration. Such a grant, wrote King, showed how "hatred, violence and ignorance . . . reached subtly into the White House." A national campaign was launched to block the grant.[65] Four days

of demonstrations, resulting in 288 arrests, took place during Easter, when thousands of tourists swelled St. Augustine.[66] Among those arrested was Mrs. Malcolm Peabody, mother of the Governor of Massachussetts.

In spite of the publicity caused by Mrs. Peabody's incarceration, the ripples brought about by the Easter demonstrations soon faded away and, as the New York Times observed, St. Augustine "regained its placid, segregated way of life." [67] When nightly marches to the Old Slave Market were staged at the end of May, and throughout June, they were attacked by white mobs. On the night of June 9, 300 marchers were assaulted while "the police were present as bystanders." [68] Two weeks later, a march led by Fred Shuttlesworth was attacked by a white mob double its size, with forty-five casualties.[69] Groups who later attempted "wade-ins" at "white" beaches were subjected to similar treatment.[70] The level of violence was such that a number of SCLC officials were beaten or shot at: Andrew Young and Dorothy Cotten were clubbed while leading demonstrations; Harry Boyte was knocked unconscious, and fired upon while sitting in a car; and the SCLC headquarters was sprayed with bullets.[71]

In this atmosphere, sheer physical protection became the movement's main objective. St. Augustine was in a state of racist anarchy, with the police ignoring a federal court order to protect civil rights marches. Unless such violence was curbed, wrote King,

"and the Ku Klux Klan driven out of positions of power," the Civil Rights Bill would change virtually nothing. Ultimately, "Executive action determines what force and effect legislation will have."[72] The brutal suppression of many civil rights campaigns during the summer of 1963 highlighted the imperative need for federal intervention in the South. Wrote King:

> so shameless are the mores of the feudal South that even in the presence of millions of witnesses police still employ such barbaric weapons as the cattle prod and the high-pressure hose. . . . as Negroes have marshaled extraordinary courage to employ nonviolent direct action, they have been left--by the most powerful government in the world--almost solely to their own resources to face a massively equipped army.

The proper and essential task of the federal government, King argued, was to protect nonviolent demonstrators, using federal marshals if necessary.[73]

The St. Augustine campaign came to an inconclusive end when Governor Farris Bryant appointed a bi-racial commission.[74] President Johnson's refusal to send the federal marshals that King requested meant that the campaign's central purpose went unrealized.[75] The enlightened actions of Federal Judge Bryan Simpson, however, did something to partially offset the vicious power of white racism in St. Augustine. On June 9, Simpson ordered the city to permit marches at any time. He also reduced the bail of arrested demonstrators, and forbade Sheriff L.O. Davis to keep prisoners in the "sweat-box."[76] Simpson enjoined the police from interfering with demonstrations, and cited the Governor

of Florida for contempt of court, after he slapped a ban on night marches.[77] Later, Simpson held public hearings that exposed the collusion between the St. John's County Sheriff's Department, and white racist groups such as the Ancient City Gun Club, ordering a deputy sheriff to turn in his badge, and commanding "Hoss" Manucey to divulge the Club's membership. But for Simpson, the Civil Rights Act would have been a dead letter in St. Augustine. Senator Strom Thurmond's charge of "judicial dictatorship" was a tribute to the effectiveness of Simpson's interventions.[78]

A basic weakness of the St. Augustine campaign was the SCLC's inability to arouse strong, active local support, and its consequent reliance upon outside volunteers. The Easter demonstrations were spearheaded by white college students and ministers from Massachussetts.[79] When Hosea Williams arrived to take charge of the campaign, he was dismayed by the difficulty in recruiting volunteers for marches, and it was a month before effective demonstrations could be staged. In private, the SCLC staff confessed that their campaign was hampered by lack of support, and demonstrators had to be imported from other cities.[80] King, who always found it difficult to refuse an appeal for aid, allowed himself to become involved in a campaign which he had little part in planning, and where the SCLC were ignorant of the local conditions.[81] "We're just over-

programmed," admitted Andrew Young, "and everybody's tired."[82]

II. WINNING THE RIGHT TO VOTE

The State of the Civil Rights Movement in Alabama

Although Alabama was the scene of some of the most celebrated struggles of the civil rights movement, it still remained, with Mississippi, a defiant bastion of white supremacy. Its governor, George C. Wallace, had been elected in 1962 on the platform of "segregation today, segregation tomorrow, and segregation forever" and, even after Birmingham and the integration of the University of Alabama, was waging a single-minded defense of the state's racial status quo.

Although the Birmingham campaign had produced a desegregation agreement, and a modicum of federal intervention, elsewhere in the state demonstrations were crushed with ruthless efficiency. The Gadsden campaign was typical. The Gadsden Freedom Movement was formed in May 1962, with the help of workers from SNCC, CORE, and the SCLC. The following month, after the five days of demonstrations, the city obtained an injunction, and the police began making large-scale arrests.[83] On June 18, 450 marchers were arrested; the following day they were all jailed, and 300 who gathered in protest outside the court house were driven away by Alabama state troopers who wielded clubs and cattle-prods.[84]

Although King and James Farmer (national director of CORE) visited Gadsden to urge a continuation of the marches, the city's policy of mass arrests blunted the effectiveness of this strategy.[85] The dénouement came on August 3, when 685 were arrested on a march led by Bernard Lee, Marvin Robinson, and Joseph Faulkner.[86] Apart from desegregation of the city buses, the Gadsden movement failed completely.[87]

The use of the cattle-prod in Gadsden highlighted the role of the Alabama state troopers in crushing civil rights demonstrations. A contingent of fifty troopers under the command of Colonel Albert J. Lingo roamed the state as an anti-demonstration force. Often they were accompanied by a mobile posse headed by Sheriff James G. Clark. Wherever blacks took to the streets--in Birmingham, Gadsden, Tuscaloosa, and Selma--Clark and Lingo rushed to the scene.[88] It was in Selma, Dallas County, where Clark and his men were based, that Alabama's style of repression was most severe and complete.

Bernard and Colia Lafayette of SNCC first went to Selma in the autumn of 1962. The following February, they began a voter registration drive, which SNCC decided to expand into a major project.[89] The influx of SNCC workers, and the inauguration of sit-ins, marches, and picketing drew a vicious response from Jim Clark. Reinforced by Lingo's state troopers, he replied with mass

arrests, and the harassment, incarceration, and assault of SNCC workers. On June 12, Bernard Lafayette, the outgoing SNCC project director, was beaten up. In July, three other SNCC workers were beaten in jail, and Worth Long, the incoming project director, received the same treatment in September. SNCC-owned cars were periodically towed away, and state troopers made a habit of surrounding the church where mass meetings took place.[90] The combined forces of Clark and Lingo overwhelmed SNCC, which vainly appealed to the Justice Department for protection. Clark's dictatorial methods were exemplified by his seizure of SNCC's records, after a federal judge had refused to subpoena them.[91] SNCC's attempt to revive the campaign in July 1964 was quickly snuffed out when Federal Circuit Judge James A. Hare issued an order that virtually legalized the police state that Clark had established. Hare prohibited public meetings of more than three people; proscribed fourteen organizations and forty-one individuals; and authorized "any sheriff in Alabama" to enforce the injunction.[92]

The SCLC's Abortive 1964 Alabama Campaign

Thanks to SNCC, wrote James Forman, the civil rights movement "had established a firm beach-head in the heart of Alabama's Black Belt."[93] Selma remained, however, an isolated and embattled outpost, as SNCC concentrated its resources in Mississippi, for the massive 1964 Summer Project. Alabama badly needed a structure like the Council

of Federated Organizations (COFO) which, in Mississippi, co-ordinated a statewide campaign, pooled legal aid and organizing expertise, and linked all the areas of movement activity.[94]

In July 1963, Ralph Abernathy had promised the SNCC workers in Selma that "We are behind you, with you, and even in front of you every step of the way." In 1964, the SCLC intended to fulfill that promise by mounting a statewide voter registration drive, in conjunction with SNCC, to parallel the Mississippi Summer Project.[95] The SCLC's plan, an all-out attack on segregation in Alabama, was approved by 215 of the state's black leaders on March 14, 1964. The heart of the plan was to be a "statewide co-ordination of the masses" to achieve the right to vote. Local registration drives would be accompanied by demonstrations, and an appeal to Congress to reduce Alabama's representation (under the Fourteenth Amendment) until blacks could freely register and vote.[96] The campaign was put under the direction of the Rev. Nelson Smith, head of the Alabama state conference of the SCLC.[97] James Bevel was in charge of direct action (always the centre-piece of an SCLC campaign) and, by May, he was busy organizing a "freedom army" in twelve cities. On national television, King promised that "we definitely plan to have massive demonstrations in . . . Alabama this year. . . . In fact, we are now recruiting students by the hundreds and thousands to join what we refer to

as our nonviolent army."[98]

The much-heralded campaign, however, was stillborn. The Tuscaloosa campaign, instead of becoming the spearhead of direct action movements throughout the state, met the same fate as the Gadsden campaign of the previous year. In April, The Tuscaloosa Citizens for Action Committee (an SCIC affiliate) voted to hold demonstrations in protest against the opening of a new, segragated court house.[99] A group of SCIC workers, led by James Bevel, arrived in the city to aid the campaign. The demonstrations, however, faltered under the familiar combination of police violence, mass arrests, and an absence of federal intervention. On June 9, 700 marchers were tear-gassed and driven back to the church whence they came. Two days later, Bevel and two other SCIC workers were arrested as they emerged from a church to lead a demonstration, along with 300 others.[100] Direct action came to a halt when a federal District Judge refused to issue an injunction against police interference with demonstrations.[101]

Other factors conspired to defeat the Alabama project. The SCIC had hoped that Montgomery would provide a focus for the campaign, but the conservatism of the city's black leaders proved a formidable obstacle. Ralph Hines and James E. Pierce noted in 1965 that King's departure from Montgomery had "left a vacuum in the leadership pyramid which . . . has never been filled."[102]

The mass participation that characterized the bus boycott had disappeared, and leadership passed by default to a group that spurned direct action. In December 1963, King complained to the MIA that Montgomery was living in the past; there was "a powerful struggle one hundred miles from here--maybe it is time we had the struggle here, where Governor Wallace will understand."[103] But the MIA failed to respond to his entreaties, and its president, the Rev. S.S. Seay, was conspicuous in his lack of enthusiasm for the SCLC campaign.[104]

King's decision to commit the SCLC to a campaign in St. Augustine, Florida, further weakened the Alabama project and, after riots erupted in the North, James Bevel and his staff were sent to Rochester, New York. The riots, coming only a few months before the presidential election, led the SCLC to postpone its plans for Alabama, suspend further direct action, and concentrate on registering voters for Lyndon Johnson.[105]

The Decline of Direct Action and the Problem of Voter Registration

After the tumultuous summer of 1963, there was a decline in direct action in the South. Police brutality, imprisonment, and economic reprisals had eroded willingness to go to jail. There was also a growing feeling in the civil rights movement that demonstrations which resulted in mass arrests served little purpose. In Jackson, Danville, Plaquemines and elsewhere local

movements had turned to boycotts and voter registration drives after the failure of demonstrations. Charles Evers, head of the NAACP in Mississippi, summed up the new mood: "stay out of jail, keep your money in your pockets, and register every voter you can get your hands on."[106]

Evers' view was shared by an increasing number of black leaders, of many different political persuasions. The NAACP had traditionally preferred legal action, lobbying, and voter registration to direct action. Bayard Rustin, leading theoretician of the civil rights movement, and adviser to Dr. King, argued that direct action should now give way to political action. Unemployment, slum housing, and unemployment, he argued, were not susceptible to direct action: they could only be solved by government action, brought about through political alliances with white groups such as the labour movement.[107] Similarly, CORE, increasingly concerned with the problems of the Northern ghettos, began to shift away from direct action toward community organization.[108] SNCC had already moved in this direction. The integration of public accommodations had become a secondary goal. Many agreed with Dick Gregory that "some of these Dixie towns ain't worth integrating."[109] By 1964, voter registration was SNCC's chief activity.

In the Deep South, however, voter registration drives failed to achieve significant increases in the

black electorate. In Selma, for example, between May 1962 and August 1964, only 93 of the 795 blacks who applied to register were enrolled.[110] In Mississippi the results were even more disappointing. After two years of SNCC activity, Robert Moses admitted that the only tangible gain was that some whites were beginning to use courtesy titles when addressing blacks.[111] Without the ballot, community organization was an impotent strategy.

Civil rights legislation had so far failed to guarantee the right to vote. The 1960 Act had empowered the federal courts to appoint federal voting registrars. By 1963, however, the Civil Rights Commission had concluded that "case-by-case proceedings . . . have not provided a prompt or adequate remedy for widespread discriminatory denials of the right to vote."[112] And, as with school desegregation, Southern legal obstructionism, allied with segregationist federal judges succeeded in fighting the twenty civil rights lawyers of the Justice Department to a virtual standstill. The 1964 Civil Rights Act had made little difference. In Dallas County, for example, applicants still had to reproduce, and answer questions about sections of the U.S. and Alabama constitutions.[113] Such tests were difficult even for the well-educated; "think of trying to teach a man something about double jeopardy, who probably doesn't even know how to read," James Forman wrote.[114]

Education, however, was not the answer. In Terrell County, Georgia, five college graduates "failed" the literacy test.[115]

Equal voting rights could only be achieved if the federal government had the authority to appoint its own registrars. Moreover, the procedure of working through the federal courts on a county-by-county basis was too slow, and too fallible. National legislation was required to enable the government to appoint registrars without first having to prove discrimination, in each county, in the federal courts. And only a determined direct action campaign, Martin Luther King believed, could bring about the passage of such legislation.

Selma: Setting the Trap

Selma, Alabama, was the perfect setting for a voting rights campaign. Selma and Dallas County had a black population of 57 per cent, but the electorate was 99 per cent white.[116] In the adjacent counties of Lowndes and Wilcox, there were no black voters at all, although their black population was double the white.[117] The SCLC had sent John Love and James Orange to Selma in June 1964, anticipating a campaign there.[118]

Selma was an inviting target for another reason; its white leadership was divided over how best to deal with demonstrating blacks. Dallas County Sheriff James Clark espoused the "Bull Connor" approach: blanket repression with the liberal use of violence. Selma's

younger businessmen, anxious to avoid a repeat of Birmingham, favoured the methods successfully employed by Laurie Pritchett in Albany: avoid arrests if possible and, at all costs, prevent police violence (at least in public). They were equally concerned with preserving white supremacy, but feared that Clark's brutal antics would only provoke an unwelcome intrusion from the federal courts that would force the city to register black voters. SNCC had already got Clark into a legal bind: his violent tactics had attracted four Justice Department suits.[119] Meanwhile, a voting rights suit, filed as far back as 1961, was slowly working its way through the courts.[120]

If King and the SCLC were subjected to the same treatment as SNCC, they would have a chance to spring the legal trap. To undercut Clark's power, the "non-violent" segregationists had the Mayor appoint Wilson Baker the city's Director of Public Safety. Baker advised Selma's whites to swallow their pride and restrain their immediate inclination to cheer Clerk as he chased King and his men out of town. "We're going to have to walk in the mud a little," he said. "I'd rather walk in the mud of my own initiative . . . than have some federal court force my face down into the mud without dignity."[121] The editor of the Selma Times-Journal expressed the same sentiment more bluntly: "If we can only get the bastards out of town without getting them arrested, we'll have 'em whipped."[122]

The SCLC, however, intended to expose Clark's methods to the glare of the national and international news media. Its chances of doing so were good. Although Wilson Baker controlled Selma's police force, the voter registration office was located in the Dallas court house, which came under Clark's jurisdiction. Moreover, Baker's authority was weakened by the lack of firm support from Mayor Joseph T. Smitherman, a close friend of Governor George Wallace.[123] The SCLC's Operation Dialog, a team of whites headed by Harry Boyte, analyzed the attitudes of Selma's white citizens, and concluded that the potential for racist violence was immense.[124]

Phase I: Filling the Jails

On January 2, 1965, Martin Luther King addressed 700 blacks in Selma:

> We are going to start a march on the ballot boxes by the thousands. We must be willing to go to jail by the thousands. We are not on our knees begging for the ballot. We are demanding the ballot.125

During the next two weeks, King's staff recruited volunteers for a "Freedom Day," when blacks would apply to register en masse.[126] On January 18, King and John Lewis led 400 to the court house, where they waited all day in a vain attempt to register. Because there were no arrests, Newsweek thought it a tactical victory for Wilson Baker.[127] It was a premature verdict: the following day, Clark refused to go along with Baker's tactics, and arrested 67 applicants, who refused to line up in a side

alley.[128] Now, having brought conflict between Clark and Baker out into the open, the SCLC decided to escalate the campaign and "fill the jails."

For two weeks, the SCLC had obeyed a ban on marching without a parade permit from the city. On February 1, King defied the ban, and was arrested with 770 others. It was a deliberate act: the SCLC wanted Baker to be the arresting officer, thus destroying his image as a mild-mannered man of reason.[129] Within five days, 3,500 had been arrested, including 700 in nearby Marion, Perry County.[130] Time felt that "Alabama's remarkably stupid law enforcement officials . . . fell hook, line and sinker for his King's bait."[131] Yet Baker was pursuing the same policy employed by Laurie Pritchett in Albany. Indeed, he had no choice but to arrest the marchers. Such was the nature of white supremacy in Alabama that to allow blacks to demonstrate at will would be tantamount to permitting open rebellion. From his prison cell, King wrote: "There are more Negroes in jail with me than there are on the voting rolls."[132]

On February 4, the campaign achieved its first objective when Federal Judge Daniel H. Thomas ordered Dallas County to register all those who were eligible by July 1. He also voided the county's 20-page constitution interpretation test, and commanded the board of registrars to process at least twenty applicants each day. Thomas's injunction was, however, a case of too little, too late. Firstly, his stipulation that the

registrars meet "more often" than once a fortnight meant that, at the most, only 400 applicants could be registered each month. Secondly, a decision covering Dallas County did not affect the hundreds of other Southern counties where similar discrimination occurred. The SCLC was seeking legislation that would guarantee the right to vote everywhere.[133]

King's radical critics often assumed that the SCLC's strategy in Selma had been "carefully worked out with high Administration liberals."[134] Johnson, however, had no plans for introducing a voting bill in 1965. According to Rowland Evans and Robert Novak, he "had hoped that the 1964 Civil Rights Act would be the last word in such legislation for several years to come," and expressed "deep resentment" over King's campaign.[135] Johnson only introduced the sought-after bill when public opinion compelled him to do so. As Vice President Humphrey told King on February 9, a voting rights bill would only succeed "if the pressure was unrelenting."[136] The SCLC's task in the second phase of the Selma campaign was to generate unrelenting pressure.

Phase II: Discrediting the Opposition

Journalists frequently expressed surprise that Jim Clark failed to perceive the tactical stupidity of police violence. Sometimes it appeared as if he were the movement's ally. As Newsweek commented, after Clark and his men had surrounded 165 children with cars and

vans, and chased them three miles out of the city, "the resourceful sheriff paid his symbolic civil rights dues again."[137] Nor did Clark confine his violence to the rank-and-file. James Bevel was clubbed, arrested, and then chained to a hospital bed.[138] On February 16, C.T. Vivian was assaulted by Clark himself. After punching Vivian in the mouth, Clark told reporters: "If I hit him, I don't know it. One of the first things I ever learned was not to hit a nigger with your fist because his head is too hard."[139]

Clark's adeptness at presenting himself as "the perfect public villain" did not stem from his support of voting rights legislation. While it was true that, as Time observed, Clark unwittingly rescued King's campaign whenever it seemed in danger of flagging, his violence was entirely predictable.[140] De jure segregation could not be maintained without force and repression. The SCLC wrote King, merely brought it to the surface:

> The brutality with which officials would have quelled the black individual became impotent when it could not be pursued with stealth and remain unobserved. It was caught . . . in gigantic circling spotlights, It was imprisoned in a luminous glare revealing the naked truth to the whole world.141

The experience of Albany and Birmingham had shown that a campaign's success depended on "racists unleashing violence" against nonviolent demonstrators. Only then did "Americans of conscience . . . demand federal intervention and legislation." [142] This stage had not yet been

reached in Selma. The second phase of the campaign saw the SCLC adopting tactics of an increasingly dangerous nature, making an explosion of white violence all but inevitable. For a month, the SCLC experimented with different types of direct action. The voter registration drive was expanded into Lowndes, Perry, and Wilcox counties and, on February 15, marches were held in Selma, Marion and Camden.[143] Then the movement turned to night marches, an audacious tactic that had been employed in Savannah and St. Augustine. In Marion, on February 18, 400 blacks marched out into the night to be attacked by Clark's posse, fifty state troopers, and an indeterminate number of white vigilantes. One of the marchers, Jimmie Lee Jackson, was shot by a trooper, and then beaten unconscious. Eight days later he died.[144] However, Jackson's fatal wounding failed to command the attention of the press, and, because of a ban by Governor Wallace, night marches had to be abandoned. The appropriate tactic had yet to be found.[145]

One of the difficulties of the Selma campaign was the absence of black support in Montgomery. In late 1964, James Bevel and James Orange had helped organize youth groups there, but black Montgomery remained silent during the momentous struggle that was being staged fifty miles away.[146] King had attempted to lead a mass march in Montgomery on February 9, but barely 200 people had turned out.[147] Then, when the Selma campaign was

approaching stalemate, James Bevel had an idea: why not take the movement to Montgomery? A march from Selma to Montgomery would not only dramatize the issue of voting rights in a unique fashion, it would also provide the SCLC with a powerful lever for bringing about federal intervention, for such a march would require extensive protection. Bevel "could hardly sleep for excitement at his inspiration," wrote Charles Fager.[148] Announcing the march, King vowed:

> I can't promise you that it won't get you beaten. I can't promise you that it won't get your house bombed. I can't promise you won't get scarred up a bit. But we must stand up for what is right. 149

The Pettus Bridge Attack and the Emergence of the Voting Rights Bill

On Sunday, March 7, as they set out to march from Selma to Montgomery, 525 blacks and a handful of whites were attacked on the Edmund Pettus bridge, on the outskirts of Selma. Using tear-gas, clubs, and whips, Al Lingo's state troopers and Jim Clark's possemen injured seventy-eight of the marchers, including John Lewis, who suffered a fractured skull.[150]

"Rarely in history," wrote Time,"has public opinion reacted so spontaneously and with such fury." Ten thousand marched in sympathy in Detroit, fifteen thousand in Washington, and twenty-five thousand in Boston; SNCC staged sit-ins at the Justice Department and the White House; and Lyndon Johnson was inundated with

demands for federal intervention. "Every politician who could get a reporter to listen to him," wrote Charles Fager, with only a little exaggeration, urged the President to bring the Southern racists to heel.[151]

The most influential voice was the church's. Responding to an appeal from King, clergymen of all ranks and denominations streamed to Selma. They included Episcopal Bishop James A. Pike of California; the Rev. David R. Hunter, deputy director of the National Council of Churches; John Wesley Lord, Methodist Bishop of Washington, D.C.; and Archbishop Iakovos of the Greek Orthodox Church. Especially significant was the number of Roman Catholics who, for the first time, were actively supporting the civil rights movement. All told, more than four hundred clergymen arrived in Selma in the week after March 7.[152]

Ramparts magazine considered that Lyndon Johnson made a gigantic political miscalculation in underestimating "the speed and intensity of the nation's reaction to Selma." Yet, displaying a political agility that confounded his opponents and impressed his friends, Johnson turned the crisis to his own advantage. A voting bill would increase the number of Democratic voters; he had nothing to fear from George Wallace, his political base being secure; and the enfranchisement of Alabama's blacks might even topple the Governor from power. It was, moreover, a popular cause, and the murder of the Rev. James Reeb, and the obtuse defiance of Wallace further

increased its popularity. Johnson, wrote Rowland Evans and Robert Novak, "began to view the Selma crisis as a rare opportunity for personal leadership."[153] Regardless of the President's motives, the Voting Rights Bill he submitted to the Congress on March 17 represented a massive breakthrough for the civil rights movement in the South, and a stunning triumph for King and the SCLC.

The Pettus Bridge Compromise

Although James Forman and others in SNCC were highly critical of King's decision not to lead the March 7 march, King's absence was understandable. Few had anticipated an attack, let alone one of such severity. In an "agony of conscience" for not having been there, however, King vowed to personally lead another march two days later.[154] It was a decision that placed King in an unenviable dilemma, for when the SCLC's lawyers filed suit to void Governor Wallace's march ban, Federal District Judge Frank M. Johnson, Jr., told them to postpone the march until hearings were held on March 11.[155] Pressure for a march, however, was building up. A host of clergymen had arrived in Selma and, as one of them put it, "We didn't come from all over the country just to stand around."[156] SNCC, reinforced by twenty-five field workers from Jackson, Mississippi, was determined to march.[157] Andrew Young recalled:

> There just had to be a march. . . . This was not the NAACP, and as we looked around the room at the

/Continued

> bandages and bruises, we knew we had to do something. We knew that whatever we did, the SNCC people . . . were going to be on that bridge, and the real question was, 'Who would lead the people, and in what?'[158]

But the March 9 march was essentially a charade. After leading 2,000 blacks and whites to the Pettus bridge, King led them back after a song and a prayer.[159] Many of the marchers were confused and frustrated; a few felt betrayed.

King's curtailment of the march was entirely consistent with his beliefs. One of the basic justifications of nonviolent direct action was that de jure segregation contradicted national law. In violating state and local laws, King argued, the civil rights movement was seeking to uphold national law as defined by the Congress, the Supreme Court, and the Constitution.. King thus distinguished nonviolent direct action from civil disobedience: the latter, which the SCLC had not employed, "involves defiance of fundamental national law."[160] The federal courts were the enforcers and interpreters of national law and, for this reason, King never defied a federal injunction, even if it was flagrantly unjust. "It was often very confusing--and frustrating--to his followers," said Bayard Rustin, "but that was Martin's faith, and he was always the leader."[161] King believed that to disobey a federal injunction, however unjust, would blur the crucial issue: that it was the segregationists who defied the Constitution, and the civil rights movement that sought to uphold it. It was this consideration that determined

King's decision, not the intense pressure directed at him from the Justice Department and the White House.[162]

It was less King's decision that drew such criticism as the way he made it, and the manner in which he subsequently justified it. There was a striking parallel between King's confrontation with the state troopers on the Edmund Pettus bridge, and George Wallace's confrontation with the federal marshals at the University of Alabama. Both King and Wallace tacitly agreed to obey a federal court order, but felt compelled to go through the motions of defiance in order to satisfy a previous pledge to their supporters. Like Wallace, King denied that there had been any kind of prior "deal". In fact, King had agreed to a last-minute compromise worked out by Governor Leroy Collins of the federal Community Relations Service to march only as far as the bridge.[163] "Like characters in a play," wrote Andrew Kopkind, "King and Cloud [commander of the state troopers] spoke their lines and went through their motions. If it was not rehearsed, it could have been."[164]

The Rift With SNCC

After March 9, the rift between SNCC and the SCLC was an open secret. James Forman, who had left a three-hour strategy session the previous evening expecting the march to take place, regarded the Pettus bridge compromise as a breach of faith. It was yet another example, he felt, of King ignoring the wishes of the rank-

and-file, failing to consult other civil rights leaders, and acting in collusion with the federal government.[165]

Disenchantment with King's leadership had been growing in SNCC for some time. Many SNCC workers were repelled by the emotionalism and religiosity of the SCLC's style. Observed Newsweek in 1965: "The singing, marching Negro, a bit ragged and funky, isn't the image they care to evoke these days." Moreover, the SCLC's policy of depicting King as an all-powerful "Moses" was considered both naïve and pernicious, for it hampered the growth of indigenous, local leadership, and the development of "participatory democracy." The policy of SNCC, explained Cordell Reagan, was to "try to be with local leadership, and try to serve in some sort of advisory capacity."[166] By 1964, SNCC had acquired a positive distrust of the concept of leadership itself. Robert Moses even changed his name to avoid a leadership cult developing around him.[167] This hostility to leadership contributed to SNCC's growing aversion to King and the SCLC.

SNCC believed that the fears of the black community could only be overcome if civil rights workers convinced it that they would not depart when white repression intensified. This involved living in a community for months, even years, patiently endeavouring to earn its trust and respect. The significance of SNCC's work in Albany, recalled Cordell Reagan, was

that "we went into that community, we stayed there, and we became a part of that community."[168] The SCLC, SNCC charged, would descend upon a community with a maximum of fanfare, cause dissension and jealousy among the local leadership, and then depart with most of the prestige (and the lion's share of the financial windfall from white sympathizers). Moreover, in Albany, Danville, and Selma it had been SNCC that had put in all the unglamorous but vital community organizing, long before the SCLC arrived with a camp-following of reporters and television cameras. The SCLC, wrote Cleveland Sellers, "would organize dramatic demonstrations calculated to get the attention of the nation. After getting that attention. . . . SCLC would submit a list of demands to the local power structure, win minor concessions, proclaim a great moral victory and leave town."[169] Whereas SNCC community organizing was a method for empowering blacks to challenge the established political order, SCLC demonstrations, wrote James Forman, were a "safety-valve for the American system."[170]

It would be wrong to place undue emphasis on the role of the Pettus bridge compromise in accentuating SNCC's alienation from King's leadership. SNCC's policy toward the Selma-Montgomery march was so inconsistent as to make co-operation with the SCLC almost impossible. Its original position was to withhold

active support to demonstrations in Selma. It had opposed the first Selma-Montgomery march, although John Lewis, Bob Mants, and Wilson Brown believed the SCLC's plan to be sound, and insisted on participating as individuals.[171] After the March 7 attack, however, SNCC reversed its position, demanding that a second march be held.[172] Finally, SNCC declined to "officially" endorse the third (successful) march, although it did, in fact, participate.[173]

SNCC's tactical differences with the SCLC were merely the surface manifestations of a profound philosophical and political split. The SCLC was still informally allied with the federal government and the national Democractic party; its aim was the integration of blacks into the existing structure of society. SNCC, by contrast, was becoming a revolutionary group. Its experiences in Mississippi had eroded its commitment to nonviolence and destroyed its faith in reforming the existing society. "They say they want us to sit down at the table [of democracy], " cried James Forman, "but I want to kick the fucking legs off the table."[174]

III. SCLC THE ORGANIZATION

The Structure of the SCLC

The Southern Christian Leadership Conference was an amorphous and, at times, chaotic organization. Like SNCC, it prided itself on spontaneity; it was, said

Ralph Abernathy, "a faith operation," relying upon religious fervour rather than bureaucratic efficiency.[175] As a result, one newspaper observed, "Mass meetings are sometimes kept singing and praying for hours . . . Travel schedules are made and broken and plans at times are changed on the spur of the moment."[176]

In its early years, the absence of an adequate organizational structure impeded the development of an effective programme. Unlike the NAACP, the SCLC had no individual membership: it consisted of a fluctuating number of local affiliates. King originally conceived of his role as a supportive one, with his Atlanta office assisting local direct action and voter registration campaigns by providing "staff, educational and financial resources."[177] But this proved an unsatisfactory arrangement. Until 1961, the SCLC simply lacked the resources to provide such aid. King, moreover, was uncertain as to whether the SCLC should confine itself to providing second-level assistance to local campaigns, or whether it should play a more dynamic role, initiating its own campaigns. Albany illustrated what happened when the SCLC tried to do both.

At its 1960 annual conference, an effort was made to give a more precise definition to the SCLC's vague structure. In the future, it was decided, the state conferences would work in liaison with the Atlanta office to implement both a state programme and a "general

programme" of the SCLC.[178] The adoption of this scheme did not clarify the organizational confusion. When a mass rally, planned by the Virginia Christian Leadership Conference, had to be cancelled because King objected to a state unit directly requesting the sponsorship of other national organizations, the president of the VCLC asked King some pointed questions about the SCLC's structure.[179] Here was a case of an imaginative local initiative being stifled by the central office.

In the end, the SCLC only acquired an effective programme when it began to initiate and conduct its own campaigns. In Birmingham, St. Augustine, and Selma the SCLC assumed the overall direction of local campaigns and massively escalated them. This type of strategy required a cadre of field organizers to train volunteers, plan and execute demonstrations, and carry out the day-to-day details of the campaign. The development of mass nonviolent direct action until it actively involved several thousand people, led to a rapid expansion of the SCLC's full-time staff which, as in SNCC, became the heart of the organization.

As the central staff grew, so did the SCLC's influence in the South. This was reflected in the growing number of SCLC affiliates: sixty-five in 1962, eighty-five in 1963, 217 in 1964, and 270 in 1967.[180] These increases measured the enormous impact of the

Birmingham and Selma campaigns, which not only breathed new life into existing affiliates, but also broadened the popularity of direct action throughout the South. The SCLC concentrated most of its work in Alabama and Georgia but, after Birmingham, its activites and influence spread to other states: by 1964, in addition to Alabama, there were state conferences in Virginia, Tennessee, and Florida.[181]

The Executive Staff

"Martin was a genius at surrounding himself with talents that could become truly experts in their different fields," remembered Hosea Williams.[182] King's lieutenants, the SCLC's executive staff, had all demonstrated their talents before joining the Conference. Because it was King's "own" organization, the SCLC had a loose, non-bureaucratic structure that was particularly receptive to people who could lead and innovate. Direct action-orientated leaders often felt constrained by the structure of the NAACP. As Wyatt Walker put it, "wherever within the . . . NAACP energetic and/or ambitious leadership begins to develop, you go to the guillotine."[183] The SCLC, on the other hand, encouraged this type of leadership, and recruited it at every level.

King dominated his organization as few leaders are able to. In theory, SCLC policy was determined at twice-yearly meetings of the Executive Board; in

practice, King presented already-determined policies for the Board's approval.[184] Rarely were these policies opposed, and there is no record of any attempt to replace King's leadership. Nevertheless, Joanna Grant's charge that King "held the organization under his thumb" was far from the truth.[185] It was understandable that many should believe this, for it was the SCLC's deliberate policy to build its public image around the personality of Martin Luther King. This was partly for fundraising purposes: in 1964, said Wyatt Walker, the SCLC translated King's unique symbolism into "meaningful support for his organization" to the tune of $400,000.[186] The SCLC's "cult of personality" also endowed King with almost super-human powers so that even though he lacked an organized following, he had a unique popularity among ordinary blacks, both North and South.

The SCLC, however, was far from being a "one-man" organization. Nor were the men around him self-serving sycophants. "Each one of these guys is terribly egocentric," said Andrew Young in 1969. "They didn't like to follow directions from anybody--still, they did follow the directions from Dr. King. It looked like he called the shots."[187] SCLC policy was not imposed from above by King: it was hammered out by the executive staff at weekly meetings and occasional retreats. These strategy sessions were heated affairs, and each partici-

pant stated his views forcefully, cogently, and persistently. Tempers would flare and, as Hosea Williams recalled, "Andy Young, myself, and others got so frustrated trying to thrash out problems that we used to throw chairs and tables."[188] Ralph Abernathy claimed that "the only time I have ever been hit is by a staff member."[189] Educated, dedicated, and opinionated, the executive staff--especially Ralph Abernathy, Andrew Young, James Bevel, Hosea Williams, and Wyatt Walker (until he left in 1964)--influenced and stimulated King's own thinking, and provided an environment from which, through interplay of personalities and intellects, policies of increasing tactical and political sophistication could emerge.

His staff was not King's only source of information and advice: a variety of friends outside the SCLC kept him in touch with the church, the labour movement, and the political world of Washington. Because King was a Southerner, he relied heavily on friends in Washington, Chicago, and New York. One of his most influential and trusted advisors was Bayard Rustin. Rustin had helped to found the SCLC in 1957, and he remained King's close associate over the next ten years. Rustin and his friends in the democratic left were an important stimulus to King's intellectual development. They made up an informal policy discussion group which King drew upon to test new ideas and plans.[190] King's

general political orientation, as well as his thinking on specific issues such as poverty and government spending reflected the influence of this group. Rustin was also a valuable ally. With a wealth of friends and "contacts" in the Socialist Party, the labour movement, the pacifist groups, and the liberal wing of the Democratic party, Rustin was adept at mobilizing broad support for particular causes, as illustrated by his work in organizing the March on Washington, the first New York school boycott, and mass demonstrations in support of the Birmingham and Selma campaigns.[191]

Rustin was only one of a group of friends whom he invariably consulted before making important decisions. During the Chicago campaign, and in the North generally, King relied upon the knowledge and expertise of Bill Berry, head of the Chicago branch of the National Urban League. The Rev. Walter Fauntroy, director of the SCLC's Washington office, provided King with political support from Congress, and acted as his liaison with Capitol Hill.[192] Stanley Levison, a white New York attorney, not only represented the SCLC in court and helped manage its financial affairs, but had been, with Bayard Rustin, one of King's earliest advisors. Dr. Benjamin E. Mays, president of King's alma mater, Morehouse College, was a lifelong source of spiritual and intellectual guidance.[193] King rarely imposed policy in an authoritarian manner. To a considerable extent he

delegated his authority, a tendency encouraged by his distaste for administration. Decision-making in the SCLC tended to be diffuse, rather than highly-centralized. This diffuseness even became a threat to the SCLC's organizational discipline; to such an extent that a "last say" Steering Committee was set up in late 1967, in order to a greater firmness and clarity to policy-making.[194] To the executive staff, however, King continued to give the utmost freedom, only imposing his will when disputes and rivalries threatened to get out of hand. "King understood us, was sympathetic with our shortcomings, was able to change things that could be changed, and could accept our deficiencies that could not be changed," said Hosea Williams. "But at the same time, King demanded that we give SCLC top priority."[195]

The Field Staff

The SCLC was sometimes criticized for being "top-heavy with self-perpetuating administrators."[196] There was a degree of truth in the charge. In June 1963, the SCLC was operating on a budget of $475,000, employing a staff of forty-three. SNCC, by contrast, fielded 126 field workers and summer volunteers on a budget one quarter the size.[197] Then again, a large proportion of the SCLC's staff was made up of administrators, secretaries, and executives. In 1964, for example, only twenty-seven of the SCLC's sixty-two staff were field

organizers, whereas SNCC had a hundred full-time field workers, and only about a dozen secretaries and administrators.[198]

This imbalance was mitigated by the fact that most of the executive staff of the SCLC were in the front line of direct action campaigns. Hosea Williams, James Bevel, and Andrew Young were all jailed and beaten and were, in reality, field organizers writ large. In addition, as the SCLC expanded, so did its field staff: from three in 1960, to forty in early 1963, sixty-two in 1964, and 150 in 1966, an increasing proportion of whom were field workers.[199] If the executive staff were King's lieutenants, the field organizers were his N.C.O.'s. The work of the more experienced of them was as significant as that of the executive staff. The Rev. James Orange participated in every major SCLC campaign from Birmingham onward; his special skill was organizing youths. Willie Bolden, Ben Van Clarke, and Lester Hankerson joined the SCLC with Hosea Williams, from Savannah; they were skilled, experienced organizers. Leon Hall was with the SCLC from the time of the student sit-ins until after King's death; he was a mainstay of the Conference's work in Alabama. The state secretaries, Herbert Coulton and Milton Reid in Virginia, and Golden Frinks in North Carolina, were also outstanding members of the SCLC.[200] The field staff were the SCLC's roving "trouble-makers" and

"outside agitators," travelling from one trouble-spot to the next, encouraging communities in their resistance to white supremacy. As the SCLC widened its activities, the smaller campaigns were frequently left to their direction. However, resources and staff tended to be shifted from one city to another on the spur of the moment. Hosea Williams promised that Americus, Georgia, would be the "next Selma," but when a breathless aide reported that a civil rights march had been tear-gassed in Greensboro, Alabama, Williams added: "Maybe I spoke too soon. Maybe the next Selma is going to be Greensboro."[201] Such spontaneity was, in many respects, an asset, enabling the SCLC to come to the aid of a beleaguered movement at a moment's notice. Often, however, there were complaints from the field staff that it was impossible to plan a coherent, long-term strategy, let alone get to know a particular community. As the SCLC began to work in the North, conducting half a dozen projects simultaneously, the field organizers also complained of an overall lack of liaison and consultation by the executive staff; that they were left in the dark, unaware of important policy decisions until they had already been taken.

Although the structural reform of late 1967 was an attempt to deal with these problems, King viewed them as, to a large extent, inevitable. "So often things are just wrong and we don't know why," he said during an evaluation session. Crises, frustrations and quarrels were the un-

avoidable by-product of "the existential situation in which we find ourselves, day in and day out." The failures of the executive staff stemmed from the same source, because it was "impossible for people to live with as much tension as we live with every day." King tended to endorse Ralph Abernathy's view of the SCLC as a "faith operation," and believed that its internal problems would only be diminished, or made easier to live with, if each staff member approached his task with "spiritual undergirdings."[202]

The Citizenship Education Program and Operation Breadbasket

The SCLC's Citizenship Education Program was designed to develop second-level community leadership or, as Andrew Young put it: "to comb the South for those PhD minds which have been wasted in the cotton field."[203] The CEP was modelled on a programme pioneered by the Highlander Folk School (located in Monteagle, Tennessee) during the 1950's, which taught blacks and poor whites literacy, politics, and citizenship rights. Septima Clark, a veteran of Highlander, and the founder of citizenship schools on the South Carolina sea-islands directed the CEP.[204]

An important feature of the CEP was its teacher training program, supervised by Dorothy Cotten. Its purpose was to train new leaders who would return to their communities equipped to face such tasks as voter registration, participation in local government, and the building of political organizations.[205] The CEP school, housed in the

Dorchester Center in McIntosh, Georgia, thus hastened the emergence of local black leadership. Those who participated in the teacher training program could carry the Highlander concept back to their communities by organizing local citizenship schools. By 1963, some 600 people had been through the Dorchester Center; four years later, its staff had grown to eight, and it was teaching 500 people each year.[206]

Although he believed that only massive government intervention could eliminate poverty, King firmly believed in the value of economic self-help:

> Now, we are poor people individually. We are poor when you compare us with white society in America. We are poor. Never stop and forget that collectively . . . we are richer than all the nations in the world, with the exception of nine. . . . We have an annual income of more than thirty billion dollars a year. . . . That's power right there, if we know how to pool it.[207]

Operation Breadbasket was an attempt to harness that collective power by using consumer boycotts to bring about fair employment.

The idea behind Operation Breadbasket was an old one, but its immediate inspiration was the work of the Rev. Leon Sullivan in Philadelphia. Sullivan had organized 400 ministers to lead consumer boycotts and, between 1959 and 1962, they had persuaded thirty companies to hire five thousand blacks.[208] With the aid of Sullivan, Operation Breadbasket was set up in September 1962, in order to apply the same technique in Atlanta. It was headed by the Rev.

Fred C. Bennette. The appeal of the Breadbasket concept was its simplicity. The church provided the basic structure, and the boycott was an extremely effective form of direct action because many who were afraid to take part in a demonstration were perfectly willing to merely cease buying a particular product. By 1966, Breadbasket had won five thousand jobs in Atlanta, and was extended to Cleveland, Chicago, and other cities.[209]

Voter Registration and the SCOPE Project

In common with the other civil rights organizations, much of the SCLC's work was in the field of voter registration; part of the SCLC credo was that "the most important step the Negro can take is that short walk to the voting booth."[210] But the SCLC's registration efforts were frequently criticized. "That kind of work, that knocking on doors" did not suit the SCLC, complained James Forman.[211] Successful voter registration required patient, persistent community organization; the SCLC preferred dramatic demonstrations. The Voter Education Project, which carefully appraised the registration efforts of participating organizations, was highly critical of the SCLC. "Organizational structure has been a problem," it complained. "VEP has frequently been in the position of not knowing what the organization was doing . . . until we read a press release."[212] The performance of the SCLC was so unsatisfactory that Wiley Branton, VEP Project Director, blocked its funds for nine months.[213]

The recruitment, in 1964, of Randolph Blackwell, (ex-VEP Field Director) and Hosea Williams (president of the Chatham County Crusade for Voters) gave a semblance of order and efficiency to the SCLC's voter registration work. The Conference received VEP grants for drives in Savannah, Albany, Danville, and Petersburg and, in 1965, it mounted the ambitious Summer Community Organization and Political Education project (SCOPE).[214] SCOPE originally envisaged 2,000 student volunteers working in 125 Black Belt counties, and eventually fielded about 500 (aided by 400 local volunteers) in fifty-three counties in six states.[215] SCOPE was similar in conception to COFO's Mississippi Summer Project, with Northern white student volunteers not only spearheading voter registration drives, but also teaching in "freedom schools", building community organizations, and teaching people how to take advantage of federal civil rights, farm subsidy, welfare, and poverty programmes.[216] The SCOPE workers were spread over Virginia, Florida, South Carolina, Georgia, and Alabama, most of them concentrated in the last three states.[217] It was originally intended that SCOPE should avoid direct action. However, white resistance to black registration continued unabated and, because the Voting Rights Act was not passed until August 6, it was able to frustrate, in large part, the SCLC's registration efforts: of the 124,000 who attempted to register, only 26,000 names were added to the voting rolls.[218] Areas that had

never experienced any civil rights activity gave the SCOPE workers an especially hostile reception and, after numerous beatings, gassings, and jailings the embargo on direct action was lifted, with the result that many of the local drives turned to demonstrations to force easier registration procedures.[219]

170 SCOPE workers were assigned to Georgia, where they worked in about a dozen counties. Their experiences illustrated how little the rural South had changed. In Crawfordville, for example, the SCOPE workers found that public accommodations were still, in practice, segregated. When they dared to challenge this informal but rigid pattern they were jailed; one of them was beaten and abducted.[220] Crawfordville became the centre of a major civil rights drive, which utilized picketing, demonstrations, and a boycott of white merchants.[221]

From Crawfordville, SCOPE workers fanned out into the surrounding counties of Lincoln, Warren, and Wilkes. Located in the northeastern edge of Georgia's Black Belt, they were among the poorest counties in the state. The civil rights movement had thus far never reached this area, and white supremacy was the unchallenged way of life. "For virtually all of the white people here," observed the New York Times, "resistance of one kind or another appears to be the reaction to Negro protests."[222] The first march was attacked by a white mob; the second was

halted by the ubiquitous state troopers. Observing one of the marches, the Mayor of Lincolnton commented: "If I had a machine-gun, and I could get away with it, I'd mow them down." The civil rights acts had changed little in Lincolnton. "You can't change it," said one black. "There ain't no way to change it."[223]

Americus, in the southeastern corner of the state, was similarly hostile to black demands, despite two years of SNCC activity. The jailing of four black women for standing in a "white" voting queue sparked three weeks of marches, led by Willie Bolden, Ben Van Clarke, John Lewis, and Dick Gregory. After the Voting Rights Act came into effect, three black registrars were appointed, and the black electorate doubled in the space of two days.[224] But the movement's main demand, a bi-racial commission, was not satisfied, and the one prominent white who supported it, County Attorney Warren C. Fortson, was ostracized by the white community and forced to leave the city.[225]

In North Carolina, 140 SCOPE workers conducted a joint voter registration project with CORE. Starting in the Tidewater counties, they gradually moved inland.[226] Their registration work was hindered by the fact that, under state law, counties were not required to process new applicants until October. In Plymouth, civil rights workers encountered white violence instigated by the Ku Klux Klan. The SCLC replied with a direct action campaign

led by the Revs. Fred LaGarde and Golden Frinks, which demanded school desegregation, a bi-racial commission, and the immediate opening of the registration books.[227] Hosea Williams and Floyd McKissick demanded, in addition, state action to curb the white vigilantes who terrorized Plymouth's black community.[228] After almost a month of demonstrations, the Plymouth campaign came to an inconclusive end. Governor Dan Moore publicly repudiated the Klan, and also helped to set up a bi-racial commission. But the registration books remained closed.[229]

In Alabama, the SCOPE drives were a continuation of the civil rights activity that had flowered in the Black Belt after the Selma campaign. Here, the distinction between voter registration and direct action was academic, for violent white resistance was the rule rather than the exception. By July, SCOPE workers had been beaten up in Wilcox and Monroe counties; and in Greensboro, Hale County, white repression was so severe that a full-blown direct action movement emerged.[230] During the campaign, marchers were tear-gassed, 500 were arrested, and two black churches were burnt to the ground. A half-hearted intervention by Federal Judge Daniel A. Thomas brought little relief. Thomas voided Greensboro's literacy test, but permitted the substitution of an "easier" one. He refused to enjoin the police from breaking up civil rights marches.[231]

The SCLC After Selma

The SCOPE project illuminated the partial nature of the SCLC's victory in Alabama. James Bevel's ambitious plan for a campaign of massive direct action to topple the state government came to nothing; King's more modest proposal for a national economic boycott of Alabama was buried under an avalanche of criticism; the SCOPE campaign fell far short of the SCLC's expectations. Most discouraging of all, implementation of the Voting Rights Act was slow and reluctant. (As King later noted, there were no federal examiners at all in the home districts of the most powerful Southern Senators.)[232]

Nevertheless, when the SCLC met for its annual convention in August, it had reason to feel proud and confident. The Selma-Montgomery march--every yard protected by the federal government--had been a magnificent symbol. "People like Jim Clark had said, 'If you march, you do so over my dead body;'" wrote Coretta King, "and Wallace had said, 'They shall not pass.' But here we were."[233] Now, turning its eyes to the North (at a time when Watts was still--by a few days--in the future) the SCLC felt the exhilaration of victory. Andrew Young, delivering the keynote address, believed that

> with a little planning and effort it would be possible to recruit a nonviolent army of upwards of one hundred thousand in any city in the country. . . . Just imagine what it would be like to turn Jim Bevel, Hosea Williams, and C.T.Vivian on a community for a few weeks, along with Dr. King and the others. 234

CHAPTER V

MARTIN LUTHER KING'S SOCIAL AND POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY: THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF NONVIOLENT DIRECT ACTION

I. THE RELIGIOUS FOUNDATIONS

The Power of God in History

Christian dogma has traditionally asserted that individuals are subject to a Divine judgement, based upon the law: "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." Martin Luther King contended that this law also applied in the secular world; one did not have to wait until the afterlife to see that "Truth crushed to earth will rise again," for the power of a Divine presence was manifest in the workings of human history. The result of history's "struggle between good and evil" could not be in doubt because "the universe is on the side of justice."[1] A Divinely-inspired moral law made it inconceivable that evil could persist indefinitely:

> History is the story of evil forces that advance with seemingly irresistible power only to be crushed by the battering-rams of the forces of justice. There is a law in the moral world--a silent, inevitable imperative, akin to the laws in the physical world--which reminds us that life will only work in a certain way.[2]

At times King appeared to explain specific historical events in terms of Divine intervention. He approvingly quoted Victor Hugo's verdict on Napoleon: his "fall was decreed" because he "vexed God."[3] Similarly, the recent

disintegration of European colonialism had commenced when "the quite invisible law began to operate."[4] History's metaphysical dimension was also cited to account for the origins of the Montgomery bus boycott:

> There is something about that protest that is suprarational. . . . Whatever the name, some extra-human force labors to create a harmony out of the discords of the universe. There is a creative power that works to pull down mountains of evil and level hilltops of injustice. God still works through history His wonders to perform. It seems as though God had decided to use Montgomery as the proving ground for the struggle and triumph of freedom and justice in America.5

Contemporary critics argued that the "real world" did not possess the kind of underlying, pre-determined moral structure that King attributed to it, and that there was no foundation to his belief in "God as a supernatural being still working wonders in the world."[6] To most historians the idea of a universal, absolute moral law governing history appears absurd; in E.H. Carr's phrase, it "turns history into theology" by ascribing the motive force of human action to "some extra-historical and super-rational power."[7] Those who reject such a belief would have severe misgivings about any political philosophy constructed upon these metaphysical foundations, because it would be flawed in two respects. Firstly, it would suffer from excessive optimism; secondly, lacking a proper appreciation of the role of power in human affairs, it would be characterized by a debilitating emphasis upon morality, faith, and the power of prayer. Many blamed the

post-Selma defeats of the civil rights movement upon precisely these flaws: King had saddled the movement with an ideology which was based upon a false conception of political reality. As Andrew Kopkind put it, King had "simply, and disastrously, arrived at the wrong conclusions about the world;" his view of contemporary society, said Kopkind, was completely devoid of historical perspective: "He seems to believe that progress is inevitable because compelled by an abstract moral force."[8] This kind of misgiving contributed powerfully to the birth of Black Power: power, not God, nonviolence, or love, was the real determinant of history and political reality. As Cecil Moore of the Philadelphia NAACP contemptuously remarked, "We're not here to pray the bigots out, we're here to drive them out."[9]

The Idea of Progress

The analysis of King's philosophy must make a clear and careful distinction between his belief in history as progress, and his (alleged) conviction that that progress was attributable not to the actions of humans, but to the intervening hand of a God.

King's fundamental optimism concerning the future should not be too readily dismissed as naïve or unhistorical. The idea of progress is a deeply-rooted tradition in Western thought. As Frank E. Manuel has pointed out, it is an especially strong and persistent

theme in historical writing, from the time of the early Christians onward.[10] Indeed, many historians regard the idea of progress as the defining feature of historical thought: it is required by history to distinguish itself from--and liberate itself from--what J.H. Plumb called "the dead hand of the past."[11] Without faith in the future there can be no real meaning or direction in the past, no real "history." As E.H. Carr has put it, "History . . . can only be written by those who find and accept a sense of direction in history itself. The belief that we have come from somewhere is closely linked with the belief that we are going somewhere."[12] King's unshakeable optimism, his "audacious faith in the future of mankind," was firmly rooted in the mainstream of Western historical and philosophical thought.[13]

King attributed meaning in history to the unfolding of a divine purpose. His frequent references to God in history were affirmations that history is progress; progress was the growth of love (agape), and God was the source of all love. But, as John W. Rathbun has pointed out, "King does not particularly care which philosophical or theological terms are used to describe God."[14] When he invoked God in his description of the origins of the Montgomery bus boycott he was not attributing Rosa Parks' defiance to a specific act of God: he was simply--and correctly--saying that the Montgomery protest had a trans-

cendent historical significance, a symbolic importance which derived from a deeper and wider historical movement. For King, such movements were the human manifestations of the underlying moral structure of the universe; in short, they had meaning, and it did not matter whether that meaning was due to the Zeitgeist, a "principle of concretion," or a "Personal God."[15] King's conviction that life has meaning was an expression of what could be termed the lowest common denominator of religious belief, a rejection of the existentialist assertion of life's absurdity and meaninglessness, and a faith that there was, in Paul Tillich's terminology, a "God above the God of theism."[16]

King's Rejection of Determinism

On many occasions it seemed as though King treated God as what E.H. Carr called the "joker" in history's pack of cards--the one kept in reserve to explain that which rational explanation could not account for.[17] Yet King rejected determinism and the notion of divine intervention in human affairs:

> We are gravely misguided if we think the struggle will be won only through prayer. God, who gave us minds for thinking and bodies for working, would defeat his own purpose if he permitted us to obtain through prayer what may come through work or intelligence. . . . No prodigious thunderbolt from heaven will blast away evil. No mighty army of angels will descend to force men to do what their wills resist.[18]

Such statements recur throughout King's writings, sermons, and speeches. Implicit in his view of social change was

a faith in man's capacity--his freedom--to make moral choices; freedom was the ability to deliberate and choose. Determinism conceived of man as a "helpless worm crawling through the mass of an evil world;" King agreed with Paul Tillich that freedom was the most important defining feature of human existence.[19] His thought was informed by a humanistic confidence in the innate capacity of humans to freely progress toward the achievement of moral ends:

> I refuse to accept the idea that man is mere flotsam and jetsam in the river of life which surrounds him. I refuse to accept the view that mankind is so tragically bound to the starless midnight of war and racism that the bright daybreak of peace can never become a reality. . . . I believe that unarmed truth and unconditional love will have the final word in reality.20

God, nevertheless, retained a central place in King's social philosophy, for man could not eradicate evil by himself. Evil was an objective reality; "its nagging, prehensile tentacles project into every level of human existence."[21] Man had to accept that reality, and recognize that his freedom "always operates within a predestined structure."[22] Yet that structure was favorable to justice; by working within it--by accepting God--humans could create a "beloved community" on earth. Human effort had to be aided by religious faith.[23] King's God was thus more than Hegel's Spirit or Tillich's almost desperate "self-affirmation 'in spite of:'" his was a personal God.[24]

Through a personal God humans could overcome their innate evil and, instead, develop their innate moral strength and sense of purpose. A personal God meant the reinforcement of, and the drawing out of, what was best in the human personality:

> To say that God is personal is . . . to take what is noblest and finest in our consciousness and affirm its perfect existence in Him. It is certainly true that human personality is limited, but personality as such involves no necessary limitations. It simply means self-consciousness and self-direction.[25]

This is how the power of God worked in history: not through miracles, divine intervention, or a deterministic moral law, but through human actions guided by "self-consciousness and self-direction" attained by religious faith. Faith was "the principle which opens the door for God to work through man."[26]

A personal God also sustained the individual in times of despair and crisis, imparting to him the strength and courage to endure hardship, suffering, self-sacrifice and defeat.[27] It was this faith that buoyed King's fervent optimism, as well as convincing him of the virtue and value of "unmerited suffering." The everyday dangers entailed by his civil rights role made a personal God a "living reality," whereas it had previously been merely a "metaphysical category that I found theologically and intellectually satisfying."[28]

King's rejection of determinism, and his parallel belief in an absolute moral law, gave a persistent tension

to his thought. Humans are free, but "Freedom is always within the framework of destiny."[29] Their freedom meant they could choose; their destiny meant they had to choose. This tension, this polarity, was at the heart of King's historical vision. Moral progress was not inevitable for humans could choose to follow evil. But the consequences of the latter were always disastrous for "Christianity contends that evil contains the seed of its own destruction."[30] King regarded this religious dogma as if it were an historical law, and he cited history to prove it. His conception of history was not, of course, systematically developed, but it was coloured by the ideas, especially, of Toynbee, Hegel and Marx. History, according to King, was the story of the rise and decline of great nations and civilizations, each of which made a specific contribution to the moral or material progress of humanity. Their decline was not, however, decreed by an immutable historical or sociological law, but represented "the passing of systems that were born in injustice, nurtured in inequality and reared in exploitation. They represent the inevitable decay of any system based on principles that are not in harmony with the moral laws of the universe."[31] With Hegel, King viewed history as the development of freedom but, with Toynbee, he attributed the collapse of civilizations to their incompleteness and spiritual inadequacy. Greece was fatally flawed by slavery, Western industrial

society by colonialism and class oppression,[32] Racism was the contemporary residue which, if it were not abolished, would bring about an irreversible decline.

King's Prophetic Vision

This was the prophetic nature of King's social vision. Man was confronted by an inescapable moral choice: "History is cluttered with the wreckage of nations and individuals who pursued this self-defeating path of hate. . . . Over the bleached bones and jumbled residues of numerous civilizations are written the pathetic words: 'Too late.'"[33] The prophetic element in King's thought was accentuated by his conviction that the moral choices facing mankind were being posed in a particularly pressing form; the "fierce urgency of now" could not be eluded.[34] "An oppressed people cannot remain oppressed forever," and all over the globe the exploited and neglected coloured peoples were breaking loose from "the Egypt of colonialism and imperialism."[35] The American civil rights struggle was but a part of a worldwide freedom movement:

> I see God working in this period of the Twentieth Century in a way that men, in some strange way, are responding--something is happening in our world. The masses of the people are rising up. And wherever they are assembled today, whether they are in Johannesburg, South Africa; Nairobi, Kenya; Accra, Ghana . . . or Memphis, Tennessee; the cry is always the same: 'We want to be free.' 36

There was an historical uniqueness about the age because it was a time when, in the words of A.N. Whitehead, "civilization is shifting its basic outlook," because "the

presuppositions on which society is structured are being analyzed, sharply challenged, and profoundly changed."[37] The result of this shift in outlook was the death of racism and colonialism. Neo-colonialism--of which King considered the American involvement in Vietnam to be a prime example--was a last, desperate attempt by the West to shore up the decaying structure of racist exploitation.[38] But whereas in the past, popular demands for justice had never been sufficiently compelling to eliminate exploitation, the present cries of the oppressed could no longer be ignored, and their demands could not be eluded: "if something isn't done, and in a hurry, to bring the colored peoples of the world out of their long years of poverty, the whole world is doomed."[39] Similarly, the question of war and peace could no longer be hedged. Unless peace became a reality, mankind would "spiral down a militaristic stairway into the hell of nuclear destruction."[40]

These were the challenges facing Western civilization. If it failed to respond constructively, it would join the civilizations of the past on "the junk heaps of destruction."[41]

Love, Direct Action, and Reconciliation

Throughout his career King was labouring to bring about specific reforms: in Montgomery, the integration of the city bus line; in Birmingham, the desegregation of public accommodations; in Selma, access to the ballot box.

But King's vision of the future transcended the sum of these objectives: he sought not only to eliminate evil, but also to effect a reconciliation between the oppressed and the oppressors. This was the purpose of love (agape), and the basis of philosophic nonviolence. King viewed the secular goals of the civil rights movement merely as means to a higher end, that of establishing brotherhood and community. "The basic conflict is not really over the buses," he wrote in his first published article. Philosophic nonviolence attacked the "basis of injustice--man's hostility to man. . . . If we live up to nonviolence in thought and deed, there will emerge an interracial society based on freedom for all."[42]

Herbert Warren Richardson has characterized King's philosophy of nonviolence as a "theology of reconciliation" because, as a method for effecting social change, it operated outside of, and above the self-perpetuating structure of ideological conflict.[43] Opposition to evil must not be "symmetrical" but rooted in the higher ethic of love for the oppressor.[44] It was for this reason that King rejected both Communism and capitalism in their contemporary manifestations. Each system represented a partial truth, but because they were locked in ideological conflict with each other, the evils of both were strengthened and perpetuated.[45] With this conflict, as with all such ideological conflicts, a "higher synthesis"

must eliminate the evils of each, and combine the strengths of both.[46]

Violence could never achieve this kind of synthesis, for it always engendered further conflict:

> Through violence you may murder a murderer but you can't murder, murder. Through violence you may murder a liar but you can't establish truth. Through violence you may murder a hater, but you can't murder hate. Darkness cannot put out darkness. Only light can do that. 47

King thus rejected ethical relativism: moral ends could only come about through moral means because evil was located in the structures of society, rather than in individuals. He did not deny the presence of evil within individuals--he was no humanist--but, with Reinhold Niebuhr, he believed that groups and societies were far more immoral than individuals.[48] Rather than consciously choosing to follow evil, human beings were locked into the evil structures of society, trapped within them, and imprisoned inside historical forces that perpetuated evil. Groups and societies justified oppression by inventing fraudulent ideologies, of which racism was an obvious example; such ideologies eventually assumed an independent historical force, so that individuals became entrapped in "the bondage of myths and half-truths."[49]

Consciously-chosen evil was certainly an ever-present factor in the cold, deliberate perpetration of evil in history. Slavery was rooted in economic exploitation; many of the latter-day defenders of segregation

were motivated by "political expediency and economic gain."[50] Nevertheless, the conscious evil of the small minority could not endure without the "intellectual and spiritual blindness" of the majority.[51] The poor whites of the South were also the inadvertent victims of racism, but they were trapped in a structure of evil which their "fears, prejudice, pride and irrationality" prevented them from perceiving.[52]

Love and nonviolence was, claimed King, a method of social change that could "transform oppressors into friends," because "It is the evil that the nonviolent resister seeks to defeat, not the persons victimized by the evil."[53] Direct action, conducted in this spirit, would not only eradicate specific social evils, but also educate the former evil-doer to reject the misguided beliefs that had led him to support the evil. It would lead him to see the source of the evil, and to appreciate the irrationality of racism. It would demonstrate to poor whites, for example, that they were oppressed by exactly "the same forces that oppress Negroes in American society," and that "through blindness and prejudice, he [sic.] is forced to support his oppressor."[54] Direct action motivated by love thus attacked the roots of evil, not merely its surface manifestations. It went beyond restraining evil behaviour: it taught people to positively embrace justice, to "obey the unenforceable."[55] Love would not only eliminate evil but also prevent either the oppressed

or the oppressor from reacting with bitterness and hatred; the proliferation of evil would be halted and, through love, a "marvellous unity of God and man" would "transform the old into the new and drive out the deadly cancer of sin."[56]

II. POWER AND MORALITY IN THE THEORY OF NONVIOLENT DIRECT ACTION

King's theory of nonviolent direct action was shaped by many writers and thinkers, including Marx, Rauschenbusch, Hegel, and Tillich. The most seminal influences, however, were those of Reinhold Niebuhr and Mahatma Gandhi. The former imbued King's thought with a sense of political realism, the latter suffused it with religious idealism; Niebuhr taught that morality must be backed up with power, even coercion; Gandhi insisted that power must be subordinated to Truth, Love, and Nonviolence. The theory of nonviolent direct action thus incorporated both power and morality, and its practice contained elements of both pressure and persuasion.

King always insisted that power and morality were inseparable; the one without the other was either impotent or destructive.[57] But there was a constant tension in his thought between Niebuhrian realism and Gandhian idealism; the latter predominated in the early part of his career, the former in the later years. When King first formulated and disseminated the theory of nonviolent

resistance in the years after Montgomery, he placed a strong emphasis upon the power of love and nonviolence to persuade. Later, when the civil rights movement experienced the unyielding resistance of white racism in the Deep South, the practice of nonviolent direct action relied more and more upon coercion for, as Bayard Rustin observed in 1964, "the Negro community is no longer taking Martin Luther King's brand of nonviolence."[58] Later still, when King discovered that racism was a national phenomenon, deeply-rooted and inflexible, he began to question the basic feasibility of persuasion, and exhibited a growing appreciation of the need for group power, political and economic.

Mahatma Gandhi and Satyagraha

As elaborated by King in his early writings and speeches, nonviolent resistance appeared to work by changing the heart of the oppressor. King approvingly quoted Gandhi's proposition that "Suffering is infinitely more powerful than the law of the jungle for converting the opponent and opening his ears."[59] Direct action, said King, was merely a means to "awaken a sense of moral shame in the opponent," thus enabling him to abandon his oppressive behaviour.[60]

The central position of love (agape, or philosophic nonviolence) in King's philosophy of social action derived from the influence of Mahatma Gandhi. For Gandhi, nonviolence was not merely a practical method of behaviour, it

was the very purpose of existence. Ahimsa ("inadequately rendered into English as non-violence") was not only a philosophical principle, it was, Gandhi contended, "the rule and breath of my life."[61] It embraced Truth, self-abnegation, and humility; it was a "doctrine of selfless action."[62] Satyagraha--a word coined by Gandhi--denoted ahimsa in its active societal dimension. In its political manifestation, Satyagraha meant non-co-operation, civil disobedience, strikes, and boycotts.[63]

Surprisingly, King seems to have misinterpreted Niebuhr's critique of Gandhianism. Niebuhr did not argue that the Mahatma's methods lacked power, nor that they were flawed by a "naïve trust in the power of love;" rather, he argued that nonviolence did not work in the manner which Gandhi described.[64] Satyagraha, claimed Niebuhr, was not really pure nonviolence at all, but a method of coercion, and its effects were similar to the effects of violence. These were unpalatable facts which Gandhi seemed reluctant to acknowledge.[65] King, like Gandhi, rarely dwelt on the elements of legal, economic, and physical pressure involved in nonviolent direct action, and attributed its success to the efficacy of love and suffering. He was wont to ascribe to nonviolence an almost supra-natural power, a "Soul Power" which could magically "disarm" policemen and state troopers, thereby defeating physical force.[66]

King's almost naïve description of nonviolent direct action was deliberate. He consciously simplified complicated ideas, communicating them in a way that Southern blacks, politically inexperienced but imbued with a deep religious tradition, could easily comprehend. Nevertheless, King never doubted that love possessed a kind of spiritual power, touching the conscience of the oppressor; he agreed with Gandhi that "The hardest fibre must melt in the fire of love."[67] It was a belief which pervaded the civil rights movement in its formative years. "There was this very strong feeling we could change the hard-core segregationist attitudes and feelings," recalled John Lewis. "There was [sic.] just a great many people who believed in that hope--what we later came to call the beloved community."[68]

If conversion of the oppressor was the end of nonviolent direct action, suffering was the means to that end. "Without suffering it is impossible to attain freedom," wrote Gandhi; "We must be willing to suffer and sacrifice," echoed King.[69] In its practical sense "suffering" simply signified a willingness to accept the consequences of civil disobedience. In its spiritual or religious sense, it reflected a belief in the redemptive power of unearned suffering. "Progress is to be measured by the amount of suffering undergone by the sufferer," stated Gandhi. "Hence did the sacrifice of Jesus suffice to free a sorrowing

world."[70] For King, too, the life of Jesus "beautifully exemplified" the redemptive power of unmerited suffering; it was his constant and inexhaustible source of strength and inspiration.[71] If the resister conducted his struggle with humility and a cheerful acceptance of suffering, he would help to transform evil into good, "for when people get caught up with that which is right, and they are willing to sacrifice for it, there is no stopping-point short of victory."[72] The source of King's philosophic nonviolence was the historic Jesus, who had taught that "only goodness can drive out evil and only love can conquer hate," but it was Gandhi who conclusively demonstrated that "the ethic of Jesus" could be a "powerful and effective social force on a large scale."[73]

Reinhold Neibuhr and Political Realism

Martin Luther King readily acknowledged his immense intellectual debt to the American theologian, Reinhold Niebuhr. He had taught King many things: the "false optimism" of liberalism; the propensity of groups, classes, races, and nations for "collective evil;" and the "reality of sin on every level of man's existence."[74] Niebuhr looked at the world without the rose-coloured spectacles of Protestant liberalism. He perceived the clear relationship between morality and power: as the latter increased, so the former decreased. "The moral attitudes of privileged groups are characterized by universal self-deception and hypocrisy," he wrote.[75]

Niebuhr's emphasis on power complemented Gandhi's emphasis on love, and had a profound influence upon the theory and practice of nonviolent direct action. With Niebuhr, King saw that given the immoral tendencies of ruling elites, oppressed groups must always accompany their moral persuasion with power and pressure: "Lamentably, it is a historical fact that privileged groups seldom give up their privileges voluntarily. . . . freedom is never given voluntarily by the oppressor; it must be demanded by the oppressed."[76] This historical fact showed that a belief in the "inevitability" of progress was tragically misconceived. Time had no inherent power to solve social problems; waiting merely postponed their solution, often exacerbating them through neglect. Time, unaided by human effort, tended to become an "ally of the insurgent and primitive forces of . . . social stagnation."[77] After all, delay and evasion were the favourite tactics of the segregationists, who were always "zealous and conscientious in using time for their evil purposes."[78] The entrenched evils of racism and social inequality could only be uprooted by the persistent pressure of a mass movement.

Thus nonviolent direct action was informed by a recognition of the need for power. Pure nonviolence, based solely upon "ethical, rational and emotional forces," could only end in failure, for as Niebuhr put it, "There is not enough imagination in any social group to render it amenable to the influence of pure love."[79] Whatever Gandhi might

say or write, his method was a form of "negative physical resistance," or nonviolent coercion.[80] In the real world, with the glaring reality of evil and oppression, any political strategy based upon nonviolence would have to utilize physical as well as moral pressure; it would be "necessary at times to sacrifice a degree of moral purity for political effectiveness."[81] Gandhi knew this very well, said Niebuhr: his conduct of the non-co-operation campaigns showed that his religious idealism was qualified by an acute appreciation of political reality.

King, in his campaigns, also demonstrated a keen sense of the realities of power. He knew that love (agape) did not literally "convert" the oppressor; as Niebuhr pointed out, "Every effort to transfer a pure morality . . . to group relations has resulted in failure. The Negroes of America have practiced it consistently since the Civil War. . . . Yet they did not soften the hearts of their oppressors."[82] The policy of moral appeals and peaceful persuasion had been tried by Booker T. Washington, and it had failed not because Washington was an accommodating Uncle Tom, but because he had "under-estimated the structures of evil" in society.[83] "Pressureless persuasion" could not change attitudes because privileged groups espoused ideologies which rationalized, as racism did, the oppression they systematically inflicted and profited by. Nonviolence could not immediately change the heart of the oppressor: the structure that sustained the evil had first

to be changed. Reconciliation between the oppressed and the oppressors was not immediately attainable, for the latter were the victims of blindness, prejudice, and false ideology: "When the underprivileged demand freedom, the privileged first react with bitterness and resistance."[84]

It was, therefore, unrealistic for the oppressed to wait, as President Eisenhower suggested, for a change in the attitudes of their oppressors. It might be true that "morality cannot be legislated," said King, but it was undeniable that "behaviour can be regulated;" it was impossible to pass a law that commanded white people to love blacks, but it was perfectly feasible to enact one which prevented white people from lynching them.[85] The prevention of racist behaviour was the best method of eradicating racist attitudes; the law changed habits, and new habits, new patterns of behaviour, gradually eroded old prejudices.[86]

To this end, ethical appeals "must be undergirded by some form of constructive coercive power," whether it be the ballot, the boycott, or the demonstration.[87] The critics of nonviolent direct action, said King, failed to see that it did utilize power and pressure: too often "love and power have been . . . contrasted as opposites--polar opposites--so that love is identified with a resignation of power, and power with a resignation of love." But nonviolent direct action was not synonymous with non-

resistance; it recognized that "love without power is sentimental and anaemic."[88] Nonviolent direct action was "active nonviolent resistance;" the use of power guided by love, conscience, and morality. It was from Reinhold Niebuhr, as much as from Hegel or Gandhi, that King learnt that ethical appeals must always be accompanied by "tension," "crisis," and "nonviolent coercion."[89]

III. COERCIVE POWER IN THE PRACTICE OF NONVIOLENT DIRECT ACTION

The Economic Boycott

In her study of CORE, Inge Powell Bell found that most experienced civil rights activists considered nonviolent direct action to be an essentially coercive tactic, and frankly accepted it as such. They made little attempt to persuade the white community, and new members who showed an interest in doing so were regarded as extremely naïve.[90] The leaders of CORE, moreover, were fully aware of the coercive nature of direct action, "and planned their campaigns accordingly."[91]

The economic boycott was the most obvious source of power that nonviolent direct action could utilize. Reinhold Niebuhr had long ago suggested that the boycott would enable blacks to gain "a degree of justice which neither moral suasion nor violence could gain."[92] The civil rights movement of the 1960's proved him correct. When used in conjunction with sit-ins, pickets, and demonstrations, the

boycott could be highly effective. The Montgomery protest had been a boycott. The student sit-in movement refined and extended the tactic, renaming it "selective buying," and using it in a co-ordinated and skilfull manner, to reduce the profits of businesses that practiced segregation. At first aimed at selected chain-stores, pressure upon the white community was broadened and intensified by boycotting the white business community as a whole.[93] This kind of boycott, a mass economic withdrawal, was pioneered by the Tuskegee Civic Association in the 1950's, and was imitated in scores of Southern cities.[94] The SCLC employed it in all its major campaigns; as King pointed out, "It was not the marching alone that brought about the integration of Birmingham's public facilities in 1963. The downtown business establishments suffered for weeks under our almost unbelievably effective boycott."[95] Flexible, simple in concept and operation, and relatively immune to white physical retaliation, the boycott was one of the mainstays of nonviolent direct action. "Always anchor our external direct action with the power of economic withdrawal," advised King; this was the way to put pressure "where it really hurts."[96]

The power of the boycott should not, however, be exaggerated. Its success was largely confined to the Upper South and the Border States; in the Deep South, it was much less effective. Here, blacks were poorer, and in a city like Albany, Georgia, their power of economic with-

drawal had little impact. In addition, the boycott could be a double-edged sword; it was also the favourite weapon of the White Citizens Councils, and wherever black business was dependent upon white credit, the white community could retaliate with effect. Finally, those in power in the Deep South were often prepared to endure whatever economic hardships the boycott may produce, for the sake of preserving white supremacy.

The Power of Disruption

Southern segregationists, wrote King, often yielded to the demands of the civil rights movement "because they realized that the alternatives could be intolerable."[97] Nonviolent direct action--the sit-in and the boycott--could disrupt the normal life of a community. Sit-ins disrupted the business of a store, a restaurant, a motel, or a cinema; demonstrations disrupted the everyday routine of the central city; and both severely taxed the resources of the police. Moreover, whenever direct action was employed, there was a risk of attendant disorder and violence. Sit-ins and demonstrations invariably attracted white onlookers, who were wont to turn into hostile mobs. They also tended to attract black onlookers who, untrained in the discipline of nonviolence, were less prepared to remain passive in the face of white attacks. Violence in self-defense was not at all uncommon in the South; it occurred in Jacksonville (1961 and 1964), Chattanooga (1960), Albany

(1961), Savannah (1963), and Americus (1965).[98] Direct action could unleash such tensions and hostilities as to bring about a virtual breakdown of law and order.

Very few white Southerners were prepared to openly support integration but, as Charles Morgan, Jr., remarked, "When the Southern way of life becomes too expensive, the Southern way of life is dead."[99] Just as the boycott damaged present business, so disruption threatened future economic expansion. A city with bad "race relations" and a reputation for violence deterred investment and tourism, and in cities like Dallas, Atlanta, Charlotte, and Memphis, the business elite opted for token desegregation, rather than suffer the economic damage which continued direct action could inflict.[100]

When King threatened to "turn Albany upside down," and when Wyatt Walker proposed to "literally immobilize the nation," they were frankly acknowledging the coercive element in nonviolent direct action.[101] Its purpose, wrote King, was to create tension, and bring about a situation "so crisis-packed that it will inevitably open the door to negotiation."[102] The demonstration was a powerful weapon in this regard; it violated the rules and conventions of white supremacy to such an extent that the simple act of marching was tantamount to open rebellion. "When Negroes took over the streets and the shops," wrote King, "southern society shook to its roots."[103]

Nevertheless, as with the boycott, the disruptive power of nonviolent direct action was limited. An overwhelming majority of blacks wholeheartedly supported the objectives and tactics of the civil rights movement, but only a small proportion actively participated in it. Some forms of direct action, it is true, involved vast numbers. Hundreds of thousands of children and parents took part in the New York and Chicago school boycotts; the March on Washington attracted a quarter of a million; and as many as one million attended demonstrations in Northern cities.[104] In the South, however, where "merely to march in public was to rock the status quo to its roots," the numbers involved in direct action were relatively small, and the number willing to go to jail even smaller.[105] The Southern Regional Council estimated that some 70,000 took part in the student sit-in movement, of whom 4,000 were imprisoned; three years later, over five times that number went to jail; and Newsweek found that of the Southern blacks it interviewed, eleven per cent had marched in demonstrations, and six per cent had been jailed.[106]

This was a magnificent achievement in view of the physical danger and economic hardship that direct action often entailed. These figures nonetheless over-represented the coercive power of nonviolent direct action. "Though millions of Negroes were ardent and passionate supporters," wrote King, "only a modest number were actively engaged."[107]

Massive demonstrations--a thousand people or more in Southern terms--were the exception rather than the rule. For the vast majority, moreover, participation in direct action was intermittent; "support waxed and waned, and people became conditioned to action in crises but inaction from day to day."[108] Those prepared to march, picket, and go to jail over and over again were, for obvious reasons, a tiny minority, and King--who was in a position to know--was undoubtedly correct when he observed that "The brunt of the Negro's . . . battles was borne by a very small striking force."[109] Comparing its theory with its practice, Anne Braden concluded that nonviolent direct action was "an idea that wasn't tried."[110]

The effect of low participation was to some extent mitigated by the fact that a small group of people could cause a large amount of disruption. The average CORE chapter (a membership organization, unlike SNCC or the SCLC) consisted of between twenty and fifty members, but they were usually dedicated activists, who were prepared to sit-in and picket for months, even years, if necessary.[111] Thus Bayard Rustin exaggerated only slightly when he asserted that "any fifty Negroes who are prepared to sit down on their backsides over and over again can . . . make a breakthrough in public accommodations."[112]

The effectiveness of this type of direct action was largely determined, however, by the level of black voter registration. Where black registration was high, a poli-

tical sanction was added to the disruptive power of direct action. Where registration levels were low, direct action could be crushed with impunity. Like the economic boycott, direct action was thus most successful in the Upper South, with the exception of such Deep South cities as New Orleans, Atlanta, Savannah, and Charleston, where significant black electorates existed.[113] In Alabama, Mississippi, South Carolina, northern Louisiana, and southwest Georgia, the black vote was "relatively small or non-existent," and here direct action made very few inroads into the monolithic structure of segregation and white supremacy.[114]

IV. THE ETHICAL APPEAL OF NONVIOLENT DIRECT ACTION

The Problem of Powerlessness

Critics of nonviolent direct action contended that integration could only come about "through political power--not through moral suasion,"[115] In cities like Albany, however, and throughout much of the Deep South, blacks had no political power. In Dougherty County, Georgia (Albany), black voter registration was only twenty per cent, although blacks made up forty per cent of the total population.[116] In many of the surrounding counties, the situation was worse. In Baker County, for example, not a single black was registered to vote, although blacks outnumbered whites by a wide margin; a similar state of affairs existed in Lee, Terrell, and Sumter Counties.[117]

In southwest Georgia, direct action carried with it no political sanctions, and as King pointed out, "You don't win against a political power structure when you don't have the votes."[118]

In the Deep South, the disruptive power of direct action could hardly be described as "coercive." Demonstrations were regularly crushed by injunctions from local courts and, as often as not, such injunctions were supported by the federal courts. In Albany, St. Augustine, Gadsden, Tuscaloosa, Danville, and Selma local movements were brought to a halt as federal judges sent civil rights cases back to local courts, and refused to dissolve injunctions issued by those courts.[119] And in the absence of any restraint from the federal judiciary, local and state police were free to disperse demonstrations with dogs, fire-hoses, tear-gas, cattle-prods, and mass arrests; jail civil rights workers and local activists; and institute a reign of terror over the black community as a whole. Faced with this kind of repression, local direct action movements soon disintegrated, as fewer and fewer people were willing to march, go to jail, and suffer physical brutality and economic privation. As Fred Shuttlesworth remarked "if the mobs don't stop you, the police can. And if the police can't, then the courts will."[120]

If the civil rights movement in the Deep South lacked political, economic, and disruptive sanctions, the

intransigent resistance and pitiless violence it encountered demonstrated its powerlessness to touch the heart and conscience of the white oppressor. King himself came perilously close to admitting the bankruptcy of love, suffering, and moral suasion as he pondered the aftermath of the Birmingham campaign:

> If humane people . . . hoped that a sense of atonement would quicken the pace of constructive change, the hope was destined to die a cold death. Instead the small beginnings of good will seemed to wither. . . . the poverty of conscience of the white majority was most clearly illustrated at the funeral of the child martyrs. No white officials attended. No white faces could be seen . . . More than children were buried that day; honor and decency were also interred.[121]

Nonviolent Direct Action and the National Conscience

Samuel Lubell noted in 1964 that "Getting bloodied and beaten" was "an essential part of the strategy of nonviolence," because it showed that "segregation can no longer be enforced in the South except by constant police repression."[122] In the Deep South, with few exceptions, white communities were perfectly willing to pay such a price, and the civil rights movement made very few gains indeed. But if whites in the Deep South were so imprisoned by racist ideology that they were immune to Satyagraha, a significant number of Northern whites were shocked and outraged by the violence they saw inflicted upon nonviolent demonstrators. By the time of the Albany defeat it had become clear that the oppressor could be neither converted nor coerced; the strategic problem of the civil

rights movement was, therefore, that of mollilizing Northern opinion so as to bring about federal intervention in the South. For the most part devoid of power, the movement had to discover a way of by-passing the white-controlled political and judicial institutions of the South; excluded from the conventional channels of redress, the movement had to "short-circuit" the political system by directly drawing upon the power of the federal government.

The SCLC, of all the civil rights organizations, most clearly perceived the utility of overt police brutality and mob violence in bringing about federal intervention. The ugliest forms of repression could, if exposed, dramatized, and publicized, be turned into a powerful ally of the civil rights movement. "If they let us march," wrote King, "they admit their lie that the black man was content. If they shot us down, they told the world they were inhuman brutes."[123]

Intelligent Southern whites like Albany Chief of Police Laurie Pritchett, Selma Director of Public Safety Wilson Baker, and Mayor of Birmingham Albert Boutwell, realized the advantages of keeping the police on a tight rein, and of dispersing demonstrations with an absolute minimum of violence. These men tended to represent the business elements of the South, rather than the rural "redneck" or poor white population, and, although

equally opposed to integration, abhorred the use of violent methods because they attracted bad publicity which deterred outside investment,&furthered the possibility of federal civil rights legislation. In Selma, Birmingham, and a host of Southern cities, the leadership of the white community was bitterly divided into "the stubbornly old-fashioned and reluctantly modern groups, though both were segregationist." [124] The aim of the latter group was to prevent the forces of law and order from responding to demonstrations with fire-hoses, police-dogs, tear-gas, cattle prods, and billy-clubs, thus forestalling unfavourable national publicity, defeating local civil rights movements, and preserving white supremacy. Albany had set the pattern for this type of action.

The SCLC, therefore, consciously elected to confront that most unintelligent and violent of police forces. Police brutality became a sought-after commodity because, as the files of Time, Newsweek, and the New York Times show, press coverage of the civil rights movement was proportionate to the amount of violence inflicted upon it. As August Meier observed in 1964, the SCLC tended to "precipitate police violence and brutality in order to focus national and international attention on and obtain federal intervention in the South." [125] This strategy had always been part of the theory of nonviolent direct action. If the oppressor employed violence to crush nonviolent protests, "He will be forced to stand before the world and

God splattered with the blood . . . of his Negro brother," King had contended in 1956.[126] He had originally hoped that the willingness of blacks to accept suffering would "cause the oppressor to become ashamed of his own methods."[127] When, however, it became apparent that the conscience of the oppressor was impervious to the ethical appeal of nonviolence, the conscience of the nation as a whole became the target for Satyagraha.

The theory of nonviolent direct action assumed that white America would respond to a moral appeal of sufficiently compelling purity: "public support is magnetically attracted to the advocates of nonviolence, while those who employ violence are literally disarmed by overwhelming sentiment against their stand."[128] Nonviolence, King believed, would arouse the conscience of the "great decent majority," who were sincerely committed to the ideals of democracy and equality but who, either "through blindness, fear, pride, or irrationality have allowed their consciences to sleep."[129] Racism, it was implied, was--at least in its most virulent form--a phenomenon of the South, deplored and detested by the rest of the nation. When racists unleashed violence against nonviolent demonstrators, "Americans of conscience in the name of decency demand federal intervention and legislation."[130] Thus the fire-hoses and police dogs of Bull Connor, and the tear-gas and billy-clubs of Al Lingo and Jim Clark, galvanized public opinion behind the civil rights movement, and helped propel

the Civil Rights Act and the Voting Rights Act through the Congress and into the statute book. As John F. Kennedy cynically remarked to King on one occasion in 1963: "Our judgement of Bull Connor should not be too harsh. After all . . . he has done a good deal for civil rights legislation this year."[131]

V. CONCLUSION: NONVIOLENT DIRECT ACTION IN THEORY AND PRACTICE

Nonviolent direct action, King believed, was a means of educating white America. If the evil of racism were fully comprehended by the North, public pressure from "the millions of Americans across the nation" would force the government to act on the movement's behalf.[132] Nonviolent direct action exposed and dramatized the depravity of racism; it

> dissolves the deceptive facade and reveals basic evils and contradictions in the society. Tens of millions a decade ago were ignorant of the actual conditions of life of the Negro . . . Until there was awareness, there could be no consensus to make corrections.133

The persistence of societal evils, said King, was at least partially attributable to ignorance. Knowledge would lead to their elimination. The purpose of nonviolent demonstrations was to show "in magnified strokes . . . who was the evildoer and who was the victim."[134] Thus nonviolent direct action and democracy were "self-renewing and creative;" as the former exposed and dramatized in-

justice and evil "the nation and the world were sickened and through national legislation wiped out a thousand Southern laws, ripping gaping holes in the edifice of segregation."[135]

In formulating the strategy of nonviolent direct action, King made two basic assumptions about the society he lived in. The first was that racism was "an idea that is out of harmony with the basic idea of the nation."[136] The second was that "the vast majority of Americans . . . support and approve" the methods of nonviolent direct action.[137] These were assumptions, however, of only limited validity.

The Decline of Racist Ideology

In 1964, citing a Newsweek poll, King contended that:

> those whites without a vested interest in segregation have found acceptable exactly the changes that the nonviolent demonstrations present as their central demands. Those objectives Negroes have dramatized, fought for and defined have clearly become fair and reasonable demands to the white population, both North and South.138

White racist ideology had continually declined since the first opinion polls on the subject were conducted in the 1940's. White support for integrated schools, for example, increased from 30 per cent in 1942, to 70 per cent in 1963.[139] Opposition to integration was rapidly declining, by varying degrees, in every field of life. It was a decline which reflected a growing recognition that blacks were, indeed, the victims of discrimination. In 1946,

only 25 per cent of whites were prepared to support this proposition; 61 per cent were willing to do so in 1963.[140] By the latter year, less than a quarter of whites professed an objection to contact with blacks in employment, schools, and public accommodations.[141] Substantial majorities, moreover, were prepared to support civil rights legislation which would guarantee to blacks voting rights, fair employment practices, and the desegregation of public facilities.[142] It was not, therefore, surprising that King should have been firmly confident that black America's demand for equality "far from alienating America's white citizens, brought them into closer harmony with its Negro citizens than ever before."[143] And by 1964, he felt that the task of eliminating overt racism had been almost accomplished, and that "race and color prejudice will have all but disappeared . . . in the next five years."[144]

The Persistance of White Racism

Lerone Bennett once asserted that "There are no degrees of racism," just as one could not be "a little bit pregnant."[145] However, white attitudes were not so clear-cut: as the 1963 Newsweek survey found, whites supported black demands--"up to a point."[146] White racism, it discovered, was "widespread and deeply-rooted . . . extending in some degree to the vast majority of ordinary, well-meaning Americans."[147]

In 1953, Gordon Allport had found that one in five white Americans was an outspoken racist, and three in five

could be described as "conforming bigots."[148] A decade later these proportions had not markedly changed. Newsweek found that a fifth of white Americans were "hard-core" racists, psychologically incapable of admitting the notion of racial equality.[149] But overt racism was by no means confined to this group: racist stereotypes were so prevalent that, when measured against the demands and aspirations of blacks, "the only conclusion to draw would be that America is on the threshold of a bloody race war."[150] The most significant manifestation of overt white racism was opposition to open housing. A majority of whites were firmly against the idea, whilst even more expressed distaste at the prospect of black neighbours.[151] This desire to maintain residential segregation, observed Samuel Lubell, was "the strongest source of white resistance to Negroes in the North."[152] It was upon this rock of white racism that the civil rights movement ultimately broke.

The contradiction between the belief of whites in equal opportunity in principle, and "the personal aversions to Negroes so many of them apparently feel" in practice, was rationalized in several, subtle ways.[153] One was in opposition to the pace of racial change. Throughout the 1960's, opinion polls revealed that most whites considered the speed of racial change "too fast," and the demands of the civil rights movement "too much."[154] The black demand

for equality did not evoke a sympathetic response; by 1966, 85 per cent of whites felt that civil rights progress was too fast.[155] "During the 1960's," wrote Jerome Skolnick, "assertive attempts to achieve . . . equality of opportunity have met with the disfavor of a majority of Americans."[156]

Opposition to the methods of the civil rights movement disguised another reservoir of white racism. King's claim, made after Selma, that the vast majority of Americans supported nonviolent direct action, was wildly inaccurate. On the contrary, it received very little support from the white community as a whole, which deemed demonstrations harmful, not helpful, to the cause of civil rights.[157] Freedom Rides, sit-ins, picketing, and going to jail also met with strong white disapproval.[158] Indeed, between 35 and 43 per cent of whites could not distinguish between the nonviolent conduct of the civil rights movement, and the violent response of its opponents, perceiving nonviolent direct action to be a "violent" tactic.[159] As far as most whites were concerned, the demonstration was only slightly less disagreeable than the riot.[160] In the light of such statistics, it is doubtful if nonviolent direct action increased overall public support for the civil rights movement; "It was almost as though every time defiant Negroes came into the homes of white Americans on television, millions of white people leered right back at the tube."[161]

The Dynamics of Racial Change in the 1960's

If it were true that nonviolent direct action was "not an effective means of increasing public support for the goals of the movement," why were the civil rights acts passed at all? If one believes, with Stokely Carmichael, that this legislation changed "virtually nothing," then there is no need for an explanation.[162] In 1967, King was conceding that the overall impact of the 1964-1965 legislation had been superficial. It had dealt merely with the outward badges of inequality, not its structural reality; it had struck at the cultural and political aspects of white supremacy, not the economic. "The practical cost of change for the nation . . . has been cheap. The limited reforms have been obtained at bargain rates," and for this reason they had been conceded by white America with relative willingness.[163] Even so, when "the recording of the law in itself is treated as the reality of the reform," its impact was considerably blunted.[164] Half-hearted and intermittent enforcement made the civil rights acts little more than the shadow of racial change.

Nevertheless, the effects of 1964-1965 legislation were gradual and cumulative. In the perspective of over a decade it is possible to agree with King that the civil rights laws, although limited, superficial, and inadequately enforced, marked the beginning of the end of Southern segregation. The question still has to be answered: why were those laws passed; were they really "written in the

streets of the South"?[165]

The Black Electorate in the North

In 1964 there were six million registered black voters, two-thirds of whom lived in the North.[166] Admittedly, that vote had achieved little "in terms of substantive gains for the Negro," but in an increasing number of Northern cities and states the black vote had the power to "swing" elections.[167] As the white ethnic minorities became increasingly affluent and moved to the suburbs, their allegiance to the Democratic party weakened, making blacks a much more important constituent of the Democractic "coalition." [168] In New York, for example, the black share of the Democratic plurality increased from 9 per cent in 1957, to 36 per cent in 1961. The 1963 victories of Mayor Tate in Philadelphia, and Mayor Daley in Chicago, were won with a minority of the white votes.[169] In national elections, too, the black vote could be decisive, for it was concentrated in seven, politically crucial, Northern industrial states, and had provided the margin of victory for Truman in 1948, and Kennedy in 1960.[170] Even in 1964, although Johnson would have won without the black vote, four Southern states would have gone Republican without it.[171] As William Brink and Louis Harris observed, whereas the Republicans could do without it, "the Democrats must have a massive Negro vote to win elections."[172]

The civil rights legislation of 1964-1965 (as well as the War on Poverty) was the price a Democratic administration had to pay for its black support. This legislative "pay-off" was, however, contingent upon the extent to which concessions could be made to the Democratic party's black supporters without alienating its white ones. For a party made up of "Negroes and people who hate Negroes," race was an explosive issue, and as the civil rights movement spread to the North, white resistance to black demands led to massive white defections from the Democratic party.[173] Democratic politicians were well aware of the depth of white racism in the North: it was there for all to see in the defeat of open housing measures in nine states; in the vote accorded to George Wallace in the Wisconsin, Maryland, and Indiana primaries; and in the almost unanimous white opposition (as recorded by opinion polls) to such proposals as school busing and preferential hiring for blacks.[174]

Polls commissioned by the Democratic National committee in 1964 showed that while racism had the potential to cause massive defections from the Democratic party, as yet it was still a "protest" vote, which spent itself in local, not national elections.[175] The integration of public accommodations, the enforcement of voting rights, and the desegregation of Southern schools were measures specific to the South, and they met with the approval of the Northern white majority. The Johnson administration

thus felt free to make these legislative concessions to the civil rights movement, confident that they would not seriously damage its political support.

Nonviolent Direct Action as a Means of Forcing the Issue

"For the politician," wrote the political scientist James Q. Wilson, "politics involves attaining office and governing, and it ought to be possible . . . to exclude many issues from its purview."[176] King knew the truth of this insight, and recognized the need to raise issues in such a way that politicians could not avoid or ignore them. "The federal government reacts to events more quickly when a situation of conflict cries out for its resolution," he wrote.[177] Nonviolent direct action, as practised by the SCLC, sought to create just such "conflict situations."

Critics of the SCLC accused it of deliberately provoking police brutality and mob violence. James Forman of SNCC recalled the scene of jubilation in the SCLC head-quarters in Birmingham, after police-dogs and fire-hoses had been turned on the demonstrators: "Dorothy Cotton and Wyatt Walker were jumping up and down, elated. They said over and over again, 'We've got a movement, we've got a movement. We had some police brutality!'"[178] Walker, in particular, keenly appreciated the propaganda value of police violence. In his plan for the 1964 Atlanta campaign, he explicitly stated that the demonstra-

tions should seek to bring about a breakdown in police discipline. Although "police conduct will be exemplary," he wrote, persistent pressure "will cause it to break."[179]

In what sense did nonviolent direct action deliberately "provoke" white violence? Certain forms of direct action carried with them a strong possibility of physical injury. The night march, for example, was an extremely dangerous tactic, which invariably attracted white attackers. Some of the tactics employed in the Atlanta campaign of January 1964--lying under the wheels of police vans and going limp upon arrest--seemed calculated to exhaust the patience of the police.[180] By 1963, nonviolent tactics were being used in an increasingly aggressive manner, rather than in a spirit of love for the oppressor. Demonstrators often engaged in "subtle provocations," wrote one observer. "They offer their 'cheek' with the prospect of receiving a slap."[181] Many whites who regarded themselves as sincere friends of the civil rights movement agreed with the New York Times that "Nonviolence that deliberately provokes violence is a logical contradiction."[182]

Although King admitted that the goals of the civil rights movement were considerably furthered when "racists resist by unleashing violence against nonviolent demonstrators," he insisted that the movement could not be logically blamed for the violence of its racist opponents:

"the oppressed person who agitates for his rights is not the creator of tension. He merely brings out the hidden tension that is already alive."[183] In the classic defense of nonviolent direct action contained in Letter From Birmingham City Jail, King asserted that to blame peaceful demonstrators for the violent reactions of their oppressors was like "condemning the robbed man because his possession of money precipitated the evil act of robbery."[184]

Apart from this moral argument, however, King well knew that if the federal government was willing to prefer order to justice, it would choose justice over anarchy and racial massacre. Blatant and calculated defiance of federal law, and conscienceless brutality toward nonviolent demonstrators were the surest ways of bringing about federal intervention in the South. The most successful examples of nonviolent direct action, such as the Freedom Rides and the Selma campaign, brought both these elements out into the open, transforming the issue from a conflict between blacks and whites in the South, to a legal and political confrontation between the state of Alabama and the national government. As the state of Alabama could not secede from the Union, and as the federal government could not afford to countenace open rebellion, the result of such confrontation could go only one way. Federal intervention in this kind of situation was rendered less painful by the fact that it was not politically detrimental

outside the South.[185] Thus nonviolent direct action was a way of forcing the issue, demonstrating that order and segregation were mutually exclusive options.

The pressure for federal intervention was augmented by the ever-present threat of black violence. The maintenance of nonviolent discipline was always a difficulty in demonstrations. The danger was not so much from the demonstrators themselves but, as noted above, from black onlookers who, incensed at the white aggression they witnessed, were perfectly willing to fight back in self-defense. Moreover, there was always the danger that if the demands of the civil rights movement were not met, black frustration and bitterness would turn to destructive rage. The possibility of violent black uprisings haunted the minds of white leaders in the North and the Upper South, and the spokesmen of the civil rights movement, especially King, were adept at exploiting their fears. If nonviolent demonstrations failed to achieve reforms, warned King, black disappointment "will come out in ominous expressions of violence." He added that he was not issuing a threat, but merely citing "a fact of history."[186] Nevertheless, King and other black leaders had a vested interest in what Ralph Ellison termed "negative propaganda."[187] The warning "Deal with us or the radicals will take over" was not so much, as Lerone Bennett charged, a symptom of "programmatic poverty," but a reflection of the fact that the influence and legitimacy

of black leaders depended entirely upon their ability to produce tangible results.[188] So they offered their own moderate, responsible, nonviolent leadership against the extreme, irresponsible, and violent leadership of, for example, the black nationalists. If white America did not grant concessions to the former, blacks would desert to the latter, "a development that will lead inevitably to a frightening racial nightmare."[189] The civil rights acts of 1964 and 1965 were intended not so much to realize King's dream as to prevent his nightmare.

White Participation in the Civil Rights Movement

"There is a dangerous silence today which unintentionally encourages evil to flourish," said King in 1965. The silence of the people of goodwill was even more of a problem than the bigotry and hate of the evildoer.[190] A decade earlier, that silence had enabled the segregationists to frustrate school integration. It was, therefore, imperative, King had written in 1958, for the "moral forces of the nation" to rally behind the drive for equality. Statements of sympathy and support were not enough; active participation in, and support of the civil rights movement was required. The federal government, Northern white liberals, Southern white moderates, and the labour movement must "rise above the reiteration of generalities and begin to take an active part in changing the face of the nation."[191] The church had a special responsibility

to support the struggle for brotherhood. It was in a unique position to educate white Southerners out of their bigotry, to desegregate their own congregations, and to "lead men from the darkness of falsehood and fear to the light of truth and love."[192]

Five years later, King expressed bitter disappointment with the lack of white support for the civil rights movement, in a document which Reese Cleghorn termed "a declaration of black independence." In Letter From Birmingham City Jail, King lamented the inability of white "moderates" to understand, let alone aid, the movement. The white moderate, he sadly concluded, was a greater obstacle than the White Citizens Councils or the Ku Klux Klan.[193] But his greatest disappointment was reserved for the church. He had once believed that "because our cause was so just, we could be sure that the white ministers of the South . . . would rise to our aid. . . . I ended up, of course, chastened and disillusioned."[194] All too often, the white churches mouthed "pious irrelevancies and sanctimonious trivialities;" worse still, the church as a whole had become "the arch-supporter of the status quo."[195]

Finally, in the summer of 1963, thousands of whites began to take part in demonstrations. Many even went to jail. In the wake of the Birmingham campaign, a black-white alliance was formed, which gave to the civil rights movement the additional momentum it required. It was a "coalition of conscience," said Andrew Young, consisting of

"labor, civil rights, young white college students, and church people." It was due to the pressure of this informal alliance that the legislative break-throughs of 1964-1965 came about.[196]

The number of whites who participated in the civil rights movement was extremely small. Nevertheless, it was only in 1964 that CORE became a predominantly black organization.[197] SNCC was always largely black, but a handful of dedicated whites served as full-time field workers, and hundreds of white student volunteers aided SNCC's work in Mississippi between 1963 and 1965.[198] The SCLC also utilized white students in its SCOPE project of 1965.[199] In addition, countless thousands of whites marched in demonstrations throughout the nation, with massive sympathy marches occurring in the North in the summer of 1963 and the spring of 1965.[200]

By 1964, however, white participation in the civil rights movement had become an issue of controversy. Many in SNCC and CORE argued for an all-black movement, believing that the presence of whites reinforced the racist stereotype of black incompetency. Only blacks, it was argued, could "relate" to the black community.[201] Eventually, in 1967, SNCC and CORE excluded whites from membership, at the same time denying that they weremotivated by racism.[202] It was not only advocates of Black Power that questioned the need for white participation. Bayard Rustin, for example, claimed that while

spiritually desirable, it was not necessary: "not one white person was needed to integrate public accommodations in the South.[203] By 1965, the civil rights movement was being "taken over" by local black communities, and whites were no longer required unless they possessed sought-after skills; as one observer put it, "simply being there" was no longer enough.[204]

On balance, white participation was far from detrimental to the movement. In the early days of the movement, integrated teams of civil rights workers directly violated the most sacred racial taboos of the South: this was a vital step in the ultimate destruction of white supremacy. While it was often argued that white volunteers, if insensitive and patronizing, only bolstered the myth of black inferiority, the reverse was usually the case. By publicly identifying with the civil rights movement, they punctured the myth of white superiority. Secondly, it was a grim fact of racism that "when blacks and whites die together in the cause of justice, the death of the white person gets more attention and concern than the death of the black person."[205] The leaders of SNCC and the SCLC were well aware that the presence of white volunteers was the surest method of publicizing Southern violence. The seventy blacks who died at the hands of white racists between 1955 and 1966 received considerably less attention than the five whites who lost their lives in 1964 and 1965.[206]

Many of the whites who volunteered for service in SNCC and CORE were looked upon with disfavour--even disgust--by a society that was still infused with McCarthyism, and narrow cultural conformity. Their commitment to racial equality was often obscured by the fact that they wore sandals and beards, professed pacifism, refused to condemn Communists, and expressed open contempt for the prevailing values of their society.

The SCLC, on the other hand, attracted the more "respectable" whites: clergymen, trade union leaders, and nationally prominent politicians. King was especially successful in attracting clerical support. Clergymen of all races and creeds augmented SCLC demonstrations in Albany, St Augustine, Selma, and Chicago.[207] Selma was especially notable for white clerical participation. When King appealed to the churches for support, approximately four hundred nuns, priests, ministers, and rabbis converged on Selma.[208] Many of the Roman Catholics had come without episcopal approval and, as Charles Fager noted, for nuns to take part in civil rights demonstrations was an "unprecedented event in American Catholicism."[209] This kind of clerical presence, which included bishops, archbishops, denominational heads, and divinity school professors, gave the civil rights movement a legitimacy and moral authority which--in white eyes--it might otherwise have lacked.[210]

White political and financial support was even

more important to the movement than white participation. With the exception of the NAACP, all the major civil rights organizations were dependent upon white financial contributions. Apart from the thousands of individual contributors, philanthropic foundations and labour unions played an important role in financing the movement. The Vote Education Project, and the SCLC's Citizenship Education Program, were both funded by the Field and Taconic foundations.[211] Northern universities were an important source of funds for SNCC.[212] Certain labour unions, notably the Teamsters, the United Auto Workers, and the United Packinghouse Workers, were significant contributors to the various organizations which made up the civil rights movement.[213] Resented though it was by many black activists, the financial base of the movement was largely white. Politically, too, the support of the major religious denominations, Northern universities, the liberal wing of the Democratic party, and the AFL-CIO was crucial in bringing about the passage of the 1964 and 1965 civil rights acts.

The hundreds of whites who flocked to Selma, and the thousands who later trekked to Montgomery, led King, on his own admission, to overestimate the amount of support that white Americans accorded to the civil rights movement:

> As I stood . . . and saw white and Negro, nuns and priests, ministers and rabbis, labor organizers, lawyers, doctors, housemaids and shopworkers ...

/Continued

> I knew I was seeing a microcosm of the mankind of the future in this moment of luminous and genuine brotherhood. But these were the best of America. Elsewhere the commitment was shallower. . . . Justice at its deepest level had but few stalwart champions. 214

By 1966, the white backlash, the war in Vietnam, and Black Power had caused white support for the civil rights movement to melt away. But between 1963 and 1965, the influence of its white supporters, even though a small minority of whites as a whole, was magnified by two factors. Firstly, they were concentrated among the nation's educational, economic, and political elite--that vague but real class that is condescendingly referred to as "the Eastern liberal establishment." This class held a position of inordinate power in the Kennedy and (to a somewhat lesser extent) Johnson administrations.[215] Secondly, Northern politicians were on the whole prepared to identify with, and support the goals of the civil rights movement as long as white racism in the North did not become a political threat. Some, like Jerome Cavanagh of Detroit, Robert Wagner of New York, and Ralph Locher of Cleveland, would take part in sympathy marches and fete Martin Luther King.[216] Later, of course, when black demands in the North made white racism become politically articulate, all but the most dedicated liberals abandoned their support for the civil rights movement. As King remarked in 1967:

> Why, this Mayor Locher here in Cleveland, he's damning me now and calling me an extremist,

/Continued

and three years ago he gave me the key to the city and said I was the greatest man of the century. That was as long as I was safe from them down in the South. It's about the same with Daley and Yorty too; they used to tell me what a great man I was. 217

CHAPTER VI

DEFEAT IN THE NORTH: THE CHICAGO CAMPAIGN

Northern Racism

In 1962, a team from Wayne State University warned that with the single exception of New York, segregation was increasing in every major American city. In 1930, over half the urban black population had lived in majority white areas; only 15 per cent did so thirty years later. The nation was witnessing "the creation of two cities bearing a single name." One was black, poor and confined in segregated slums; the other was white, affluent, and housed in spacious suburbs.[1]

Anti-discrimination laws had done little to alleviate this situation. By 1966, thirty-four states prohibited discrimination in employment, seventeen in housing, and seven in public education.[2] Most of these laws had been enacted only recently. Even so, they were flawed by weak sanctions, inadequate enforcement, and limited scope. Herbert Hill of the NAACP, reviewing the enforcement record of the New York Commission on Human Rights--one of the strongest state anti-discrimination agencies--found that nearly 70 per cent of the cases brought before it were dismissed, and that the 18 per cent that were settled by "conference and conciliation" applied to individuals; they did not deal with the broad discriminatory policies of a whole industry, or labour union.[3] Agencies in other states

were even weaker. A study by the American Jewish Congress found that their reliance upon conciliation, and their lack of criminal penalties, reduced their directly coercive effect to a minimum.[4]

The ballot had been equally unsuccessful in combating discrimination. As Frank Millspaugh noted in 1965, one man-one vote was powerless in the face of "two other men, also voting, whose economic and social interests are served by keeping the first man subjugated."[5] In 1948, Henry Lee Moon of the NAACP analyzed the political consequences of the black migration from the rural South to the urban North. He concluded that although blacks were only a tenth of the total population, the growth of a black electorate in the North would enable them to act as a "balance of power" between the two major parties, negotiating important concessions in return for political support.[6] Actually, things had not worked out that way. The black electorate gave large pluralities to the Democratic party with such consistency that their loyalty became self-defeating as the Democrats took the black vote for granted, and the Republicans tended to write it off.[7]

The city of Chicago illustrated the dubious benefits of conventional politics for black people. In his 1961 study of Chicago politics, James Q. Wilson noted the paradox that that city's black population had political representation without political power: "Negroes are . . . the objects rather than the subjects of civic action. Things

are done for, or about, or to, or because of Negroes, but they are less frequently done by them."[8] Although making up a third of the city's population--a theoretically strong political position--studies showed that Chicago was the most segregated city in the United States; yet, election after election, black voters loyally supported the Democratic machine of Mayor Richard J. Daley.[9] Here was a situation where blacks could, indeed, follow a "balance of power" strategy, yet they voted for a man whose covert policy was to perpetrate racial segregation.

Chicago epitomized the "dead-end politics" to which blacks were condemned.[10] The Democratic machine acted coercively to maintain housing segregation (thus preserving its white support), and it acted co-optively to give black politicians a material stake in the continuation of that segregation. Owing their positions to the existence of all-black wards and the machine organization, black elected officials and office-holders were not likely to campaign for integration. The South Side ghetto elected six black aldermen who constituted, under the patronage of Congressmen William Dawson, a "sub-machine," bound by political self-interest to the larger machine of Mayor Daley.[11] The terms of this alliance were that Daley deferred to Dawson on matters concerning the latter's political bailwick, while Dawson delivered the black vote on election day, and accepted the racial status quo. Given the poverty of most Chicago blacks,

it was not difficult for Dawson to retain their votes. A web of "welfare colonialism" made the black electorate reluctant to oppose the Democratic machine. "We're a service organization," said one of Dawson's aides. "That's our strength."[12]

Residential segregation was the source of all other forms of discrimination. It was also the source of the Democratic party's power. Officially-tolerated private violence was a final means of keeping blacks out of white neighbourhoods. Anti-integration riots were common in Chicago. They had taken place in 1951, 1953, 1955, 1957, and 1960; they would recur in 1963 and 1966. In all of these riots but the last, it was generally recognized that the city government was deliberately lax in restraining the rioters, and as Wilson observed: "If segregation has been supported by violence, and that violence has gone unchecked, there develops a tradition of violence which many whites come to believe has . . . the tacit consent of the authorities."[13] Chicago epitomized Northern racism in both its subtly manipulative and brutally coercive aspects. It was in Chicago that the SCLC elected to undertake its first campaign outside the South.

The Decision to Move North

By 1963, King was well aware that in the North there were "brothers and sisters who are suffering discrimination that is even more agonizing, in a sense, than in the South."[14]

But although he had long toyed with the idea of a Northern campaign, as late as 1964 he was still hesitant to embark on one. For one thing, there was still as much to do in the South: the crucial issue of voting rights had yet to be tackled. 1964 was to have been the year of a statewide direct action campaign in Alabama, masterminded by James Bevel, but, for various reasons, it never got off the ground, and had to be delayed until 1965.[15] The Goldwater candidacy was a compelling reason for caution. Alarmed by the Republican challenger, the SCLC agreed with the NAACP to suspend further demonstrations until after the presidential election.[16] Meanwhile, the Conference concentrated its resources in areas of easy voter registration.[17]

The decision to stay out of the North was not merely tactical. While aware of the potential for violence in the cities of the North, King believed that the frustration of Northern blacks would be lessened "by continuing to make progress in the South," which would provide "an outlet with which Negroes all over the country can identify."[18] The riots in Harlem, Rochester, and Philadelphia in the summer of 1964 had not shaken this belief. Like other black leaders, King underestimated the seriousness of the outbreaks. He thought that the extent of the violence had been wildly exaggerated by the press, and was convinced that a major cause of the rioting had been the absence of firm leadership, which had allowed

"irresponsibles" to assert themselves.[19] Misguided tactics such as the dumping of garbage on Triborough bridge had merely served to discredit the movement.[20] Well aware that black violence would be exploited by white racists, King emphasized that the rioters had never been a part of the civil rights movement.[21] The Rev. Joseph E. Lowery, chairman of the SCLC board, bluntly asserted that "to identify gang tactics with the nonviolent civil rights demonstrations is absurd."[22] Such reactions, which echoed Roy Wilkins's characterization of the rioters as "punks" and "hoodlums," were understandable, but betrayed a belief that sufficient moral condemnation would cause the problem of violence to go away.[23]

By the beginning of 1965--before the Watts riot--King had decided that the SCLC should, after all, operate in the North, if only to act as a catalyst for the formation of local civil rights coalitions.[24] In a January interview, his sense of urgency was marked: "America will be faced with the ever-present threat of violence, rioting and senseless crime as long as Negroes are packed into malodorous, rat-infested ghettos."[25] In March, with the Voting Rights Act well on its way to the statute book, he announced his intention to visit ten Northern cities.[26] The approval of the SCLC board for a Northern campaign was obtained in April, although not without considerable opposition, and the board's insistence that the Conference would only act on a "consultative" basis to Northern groups.

It would "assist" already established local organizations, but would not found new Northern affiliates.[27] "You can expect us in Baltimore, Philadelphia, Detroit, Los Angeles, and Chicago," King promised. "I tell you, we will take the nonviolent movement all over the United States."[28]

I. PRELIMINARY MOBILIZATION AND THE FORMULATION OF A STRATEGY

The Civil Rights Movement in Chicago

King chose Chicago because he was invited there by the local civil rights coalition, the Coordinating Council of Community Organizations (CCCO).[29] It had become plain during his preliminary tour of the North that in several cities his presence would arouse resentment and jealousy from the established black leadership. Cecil Moore, head of Philadelphia's NAACP branch, was openly hostile, saying that "The imported Gandhian philosophy of nonviolence . . . will not be accepted in Philadelphia, where we believe in self-help and self-defense."[30] Harlam's Adam Clayton Powell was similarly cool. It would be "unwise," he said, for King to work in Harlem unless he was invited by "broad united leadership."[31] Despite the support of the local CORE and NAACP branches, King realized that Powell had effectively put New York out of bounds. He had brushed with Powell once before, and had no desire to repeat the experience.

King's reception in Chicago had been different. Al

Raby, convener of the CCCO, openly sought his aid in their faltering struggle to integrate the city's school system. King, in turn, was duly impressed by the large and enthusiastic crowds that greeted him during his visit in July.[32] After several telegrams and a meeting with Raby at the annual SCLC convention in August, King agreed to commit the SCLC to a major campaign in Chicago.[33] After consulting one hundred and fifty local leaders in early October, King promised to begin an allout effort in the New Year.[34] Meanwhile, a ten-man advance task force was despatched to the city, led by James Bevel.[35]

The SCLC's host organization, the CCCO, was a coalition of about forty civic, labour, religious, and civil rights groups; it included the NAACP, the Urban League, the Catholic Interracial Council, the Cook County Bar Association, the United Packinghouse Workers, and the American Jewish Congress.[36] Before 1963, there had been no real civil rights movement in Chicago, but Edwin Berry, director of the city's Urban League, had punctured Chicago's complacency by documenting the facts of de facto segregation. In 1957, he charged that Chicago was the most segregated city in the United States, and committed the Urban League to a more militant posture, rising above its traditional role as a "glorified employment agency."[37] Although the city continued to say that any segregation was "voluntary" ("members of a minority group live together because of cultural, social

and other ties") evidence to the contrary accumulated.[38] In 1962, the US Civil Rights Commission reported that the school board had actively impeded desegregation.[39] A panel appointed by the city to investigate the city's schools found that 82 per cent of the grade schools were segregated, and that predominantly black schools had larger classes and over double the proportion of uncertified teachers.[40] Testifying before a Congressional committee, Phillip M. Hauser, who had headed the panel, asserted that Chicago's Superintendent of Schools had become "the symbol of segregation--a representative of the status quo."[41]

The obstinacy of the Superintendant, Benjamin C. Willis, succeeded in uniting the civil rights movement around the goal of school integration, and two school boycotts, in 1963 and 1964, had enjoyed massive support from the black community.[42] Willis's reappointment in May 1965 brought the controversy to a head: beginning on June 10, daily marches to City Hall were staged; in August, the Mayor's private home was picketed. Both efforts were accompanied by mass arrests, ensuing protests from the Illinois American Civil Liberties Union.[43] The pressure for Willis's dismissal was augmented when the leaders of Chicago's business community issued a statement urging "a positive policy and program to eliminate segregation" in the city's schools.[44]

On July 4, 1965, the CCCO requested the Department

of Health, Education, and Welfare to freeze $34 million of federal funds destined for Chicago until such steps were taken.[45] Three months later, the funds were cut off.[46] This was the first time that Title VI of the Civil Rights Act had been applied in the North--a stunning victory for the Chicago civil rights movement. Or so it appeared, for five days later the funds were "unfrozen" at the direction of the President.[47] This was an ominous event for the civil rights movement in the North. Not only did it demonstrate the immense political "clout" of Mayor Daley, it also crippled, temporarily at least, the campaign against segregated education. Another three years would pass before the federal government again applied Title VI sanctions against a Northern school system.[48]

At the very time that the SCLC was committing itself to supporting the Chicago school fight, it became clear that that fight had already been defeated. The unifying focus of the Chicago movement was lost, and the CCCO, formidable only on paper, rapidly declined in strength, with its demonstrations dwindling from an initial peak of six hundred to a daily average of fifty.[49] When the SCLC came to Chicago, it had little idea that it would be bearing the main burden of the effort, yet this was to be the case.

James Bevel's Advance Task Force

When James Bevel and his team of fourteen SCLC

organizers arrived in October, they made a survey of the social, political, and economic characteristics of the West Side Ghetto, where the SCIC's efforts would be concentrated.[50] Their findings made it clear that this would need to be a very different campaign from Birmingham or Selma. Goals would have to be clearly defined, a task made more difficult by the affair of the HEW funds; new life would need to be breathed into the CCCO; in the West Side ghetto, where few community organizations existed, they would have to build from scratch, from the ground up; black ministers, traditionally reluctant to get involved in politics, would need to be mobilized; and a special effort would have to be made to bring the alienated youth of the street-gangs into the movement.

During the last three months of 1965, James Bevel laboured to organize the West Side. There were three main facets to the preliminary mobilization. Firstly, the SCIC organizers tried to persuade the immensely powerful street-gangs to ally with the movement, and to accept non-violence, if only as a tactic. As a means of convincing them, James Orange submitted to eighteen beatings from members of the Cobras and the Vice Lords.[51]

Jesse Jackson, a new recruit to the SCIC, was responsible for setting up a Chicago branch of Operation Breadbasket. This involved persuading the black clergy to accept the role of leading the community in economic boycotts against businesses which practiced discrimination

in their employment practices. When King outlined the Breadbasket concept in February to a meeting of three hundred ministers, the response was enthusiastic, and a permanent organization was founded.[52]

The third, and most important task was the setting up of community organizations, or Unions to End Slums, in the various ghetto areas of the city. These were modelled on the Woodlawn Organization, a self-help group set up in the South Side ghetto with the aid of Saul Alinsky's Industrial Areas Foundation. TWO had successfully challenged the University of Chicago's plan to expand into the Woodlawn area; it had campaigned against landlords who neglected their property and merchants who overcharged; and had been in the forefront of the drive to oust Benjamin Willis.[53]

The SCIC-organized Unions, it was hoped, would give the civil rights movement some kind of solid and permanent structure. They would have a variety of functions. Their own structure was designed with the help of the Industrial Union Department of the AFL-CIO, and it was intended that they would be able to utilize labour union techniques. Through Operation Breadbasket, local ministers would lead "selective buying" campaigns; rent strikes would be used to win housing contracts from landlords; and tenant co-operatives would be formed to take advantage of federal mortgages, as well as loans and grants for slum rehabilitation.[54] Again with the aid of the IUD, wage surveys

were carried out, with a view to organizing shopworkers and hospital employees, and implementing minimum wage standards.[55] The Community Unions would also act as political units, running independent candidates against the regular, machine Democrats. Finally, they would be a means of spreading the philosophy of nonviolence, and the tactics of direct action, providing the leaders of the movement with a mass following.[56]

The Chicago Plan

After much thought, James Bevel concluded that the situation of the Northern black ghetto was that of an internal colony, an analogy hitherto developed by, among others, Kenneth B. Clark and Malcolm X.[57] The concept of "internal colonialism had an important influence on the formulation of goals and tactics by the SCIC. If the exploitation of the ghetto was perpetuated by a complex matrix of forces, the campaign would need to be multifaceted; and if, furthermore, that exploitation were primarily economic in nature, direct action would only be effective against specific, relevant, and vulnerable targets.[58]

On January 7, 1966, Dr. King and Al Raby announced "The Chicago Plan." The SCIC-CCCO campaign was to be a broad assault on the economic exploitation of the ghetto. Acknowledging his debt to Bevel, King defined the ghetto as "any area which is exploited by the community at large . . . where free trade and exchange of culture and resources is

not allowed to exist."[59] Many institutions, he continued, private, city, state, and federal, had a political and economic stake in this exploitation; few whites could avoid at least an indirect responsibility for its continuation. The campaign would be escalated in stages. The first two months would be spent in organization and education; small demonstrations would then "reveal the agents of exploitation," and mould "community consensus . . . around specific targets;" massive nonviolent direct action would commence in May.[60]

It was not until July that a list of specific demands was presented to the city, but"The Chicago Plan" had broad, ambitious objectives. A significant expansion of the War on Poverty, and the enactment of an open housing law by Illinois were the least that King expected. Such action would require strong white support, and King hoped to create the kind of "coalition of conscience" that had impelled the Civil Rights and Voting Rights Acts through Congress.[61] At its 1965 convention, the SCLC had reaffirmed its faith in the alliance with white liberals. In Chicago, this "grand alliance of the children of light" would have to be reconstructed on an even larger scale.[62] King was depending upon the support of "major religious groups, the trade union movement and various elements of the liberal community."[63] A special effort would be made to involve the student and Roman Catholic populations.[64]

King well knew the vital importance of a success in

Chicago. In the North thus far, nonviolent direct action had produced little but frustration. King had to show that nonviolence could produce tangible gains: unless the cities, the states, and the federal government made serious efforts to ameliorate slum conditions, many more riots would break out, and black separatism would increase, leading blacks into a hostile isolationism that could only be self-defeating.[65] A victory in Chicago would halt these trends; it would put the ailing civil rights movement back on its feet, and provide it with a body of nonviolent tactics which could be used throughout the North: "If we can break the back of discrimination in Chicago, we can do it in all of the cities of this country."[66]

Problems of Organization and Confrontation

The SCLC's campaign time-table proved, as usual, over-optimistic. It was not until the end of July that direct action began. The Meredith Freedom March diverted precious resources to Mississippi, and in Chicago itself, working in completely unfamiliar surroundings, the movement encountered difficulties in three major areas: organizing the black poor, mobilizing white liberal support, and forcing a dramatic confrontation with City Hall.

The process of organizing the poor was agonizingly slow. The leaders of the Chicago Freedom Movement recognized that a single, monolithic organization would be too cumbersome, and too remote from the one million inhabitants

of the city's two giant ghettos. What was needed was a number of local community organizations, corresponding to the various ghetto neighbourhoods. Democratizing the structure of the movement in this way would create a large number of part-time volunteers, and create an indigenous leadership which would be able to carry on with the struggle after the eventual departure of King and the SCLC.

To this end, the CFM proposed to organize "Unions to End Slums" in twelve areas, which together embraced some three hundred thousand people.[67] Each Union would be divided into locals of ten blocks, which themselves would be sub-divided into councils of twenty-five families.[68] The locals would constitute the basic unit in the structure of the movement; they would hold weekly mass meetings, as well as conducting demonstrations, boycotts, and rent strikes. In the end, however, the SCLC was defeated by its limited resources and by the mammoth size of its task. Only two full-time organizers could be assigned to each local.[69] In early March, the Industrial Union Department of the AFL-CIO provided one hundred and twenty-five UAW organizers, but they were available for only four days.[70] The SCLC had never engaged in this kind of work before. With their fondness for oratory, spontaneity, and dramatic confrontations, many of its staffers found community organizing tedious and unrewarding, especially when the people whom they were trying to organize greeted their efforts with apathy, fear, hostility, and cynicism.[71]

King was aware that he would be dealing in Chicago primarily with one man, Mayor Richard J. Daley. However, he was not daunted by Daley's power: its very enormity, he felt, would make the task of negotiation easier--far easier than with a mayor like John Lindsay of New York, who was more liberal, but who had lost control over the decision-making power in his city.[72] King also realized that Daley would do everything to avoid the kind of overt brutality that the SCLC had turned to such advantage at Birmingham and Selma; in the North, he said, "the Pharoahs are more sophisticated."[73] Even so, King did not anticipate such difficulty in forcing a confrontation in Mayor Daley's Chicago.

The Democratic machine's first reaction to the campaign was patently transparent. To head King off before he arrived, the Chicago Conference to Fulfill These Rights Inc. was formed. Most of its members were Democractic politicians, and office-holders whose jobs were in the gift of the Mayor. Its object was to show that Chicago could get along without the "outside interference" of King and the SCLC. "We have adequate leadership here," said black alderman Ralph H. Metcalfe; King was guilty of "ulterior motives."[74] This effort to forestall the promised protests did not succeed.

Faced with the unpleasant fact of King's presence, the Mayor changed his tactics. He openly welcomed King, agreed with his goals, and claimed that the city was already

doing its utmost to tackle the evils of slum housing. When King tried to publicize those evils by assuming what he termed a "supralegal trusteeship" of a West Side slum tenement, Daley responded by ordering a "crackdown" on slum landlords, sending fifty housing inspectors into the ghetto.[75] Then, he proposed a $195 million bond issue for civic improvements, and negotiated a loan from the federal government for the rehabilitation of slum apartments.[76] On the day that King announced a massive march on City Hall, the Mayor promised to eliminate every slum in the city within two years.[77] All the while, Daley was sending "fact sheets" to potential allies of the movement, which claimed, among other things, that in 1966 alone, twenty-nine thousand flats had been sprayed for rats, and four thousand suits had been brought against violators of the city's building code.[78] The desired confrontation with the city administration was proving extremely elusive. "We haven't got things under control yet," admitted Andrew Young. "The strategy hasn't emerged yet."[79] King's frustration, verging on anger, was apparent in his first meeting with the Mayor, on March 24. Although he had intended that Al Raby should speak for the Chicago Freedom Movement, King himself spoke for twenty minutes. He made plain his displeasure at the city's lack of response to the movement's demands. Noting that nobody from the Board of Education was present,

he implied that the negotiations were not being conducted in good faith, and went on to warn that there was a serious possibility of violence without concessions from the city.[80] In an unusually candid interview in July, King gave vent to his frustration. In the North, he said, "They'll let march all summer and not give you a thing. In Chicago . . . Mayor Daley's response was to play tricks with us--to say he's going to end the slums, but not doing any concrete things."[81]

II. CONFRONTATION AND CAPITULATION

The Soldier Field Rally and the West Side Riot

During June, the Chicago Freedom Movement began to formulate a plan of action to mobilize the support of those already organized around a set of specific demands. Constituent groups were invited to submit programmatic proposals by June 17, and a special invitation to participate was extended to the Spanish-American community.[82] Meanwhile, a series of local "Freedom Festivals" led up to a massive rally at the Soldier Field stadium, where the final package of demands was presented.[83]

The Soldier Field rally of July 10 marked the commencement of the direct action phase of the campaign. Floyd McKissick's presence among the guest speakers emphasized the unity of the civil rights movement, which had been recently sundered by the Black Power concept

recently adopted by SNCC and CORE during the Meredith March.[84] Even more important was Archbishop Cody's endorsement of the CFM's demands. The Archbishop ordered a pastoral letter of support to be read from the pulpit of every Roman Catholic Church in the Chicago Archdiocese, the largest in the country.[85] King's own speech dwelt upon the hideous conditions of ghetto life. "We are tired," he said, "of living in rat-infested slums and in the Chicago Housing Authority's cement reservations." As usual, he stated that freedom would never be granted voluntarily by the oppressor unless it were firmly demanded by the oppressed, and as well as issuing the standard threat to fill the jails of the city, King extended a warning to the Mayor: heed black demands or be prepared to lose black votes: "This day we must decide that our votes will determine who will be the Mayor of Chicago next year."[86]

A list of the demands was affixed to door of City Hall. Affirmative efforts to eliminate discrimination were sought from the city, state and federal governments, from private business, and from labour unions. The central demands dealt with housing. Pledges of non-discrimination were asked for from the real estate industry, and from banks and other lending institutions. The Chicago Real Estate Board was commanded to drop its suit against the city's fair housing law, and to suspend the licences of recalcitrant members. The City was instructed to

embark upon a crash programme of slum rehabilitation, and to erect low-density public housing in each of the city's fifty wards.[87] King met Daley the next day; again, nothing of substance emerged, the Mayor merely claiming that he was doing all that could be done, and accusing the CFM of making extravagant demands without offering specific programmes.[88] Recording his disappointment with the meeting, King promised that "there will be marches and there will be mass jailings."[89] He also repeated his threat of the previous day, that black voters would be encouraged to oppose the regular Democratic candidates in the elections of the following year.[90]

Two days later, a riot erupted in the West Side ghetto. King and his aides were powerless to stop it.[91] Only three days earlier, King had warned that without concessions from the city, a riot could very well occur.[92] Neverthless, accusations of SCLC irresponsibility flew thick and fast from City Hall. Daley charged that the riot had been deliberately organized by certain members of King's staff, who had been "instructing" youths in the techniques of urban insurrection.[93] (A film of the Watts riot had, indeed, been shown to black youths. Its purpose, however, had been to demonstrate the futility of such violence.) The leaders of the Chicago Freedom Movement replied that the riot had stemmed from two causes: the callousness of police officers, and the longstanding neglect of slum conditions by the Mayor and the City

Council.[94] Daley's only attempt to ameliorate those conditions in the wake of the riot was to have water-sprinklers attached to fire-hydrants, and to import dozens of temporary swimming-pools (acting on the theory that the violence had been caused by the 101 degree heat.)[95]

The movement was making little progress, and it appeared, moreover, that many of Chicago's young blacks had rejected the message of nonviolence. The appropriate tactic for pressuring the city into meaningful action still had to be found. James Bevel, King's chief advisor in Chicago, insisted that demonstrations without specific, vulnerable targets would be fruitless. The question, said Bevel, was "What kind of pressure do we put where?"[96]

The Open Housing Marches and the Summit Agreement

At the end of July, the right tactic was found: blacks would march into all-white suburbs in order to dramatize the issue of open housing. As Newsweek commented, "the very essence of that strategy was provocative."[97] Inevitably, the marchers were greeted with hostility and violence reminiscent of Birmingham and Selma. The first foray, to Gage Park, was conducted under a shower of rocks and bottles, and when the marchers returned the next day, the violence escalated: fifty-four of them were injured.[98] The mobs grew larger and more aggressive with each successive demonstration, and the police--having been accused of laxity by King and

Raby--were obliged to protect the marchers by arresting rock-throwers.[99] The police protection did not, however, prevent King from being knocked off his feet by a rock as he led a column of marchers through the sedate suburb of Marquette Park,[100] Genuinely shocked by the violence, he sadly observed that "I have seen many demonstrations in the South, but I have never seen anything so hostile and hateful as I've seen here today."[101] Nevertheless, this was the very essence of nonviolent direct action. Not only was the full depravity of Northern racism exposed, but also King had found Daley's Achilles heel: the only way that the white suburban homeowners could register their annoyance at the marches was to vote Republican. A "white backlash" in the forthcoming elections, together with the possible defection of thousands of black voters, would damage the Democratic party and break the grip of the machine on Chicago politics.[102] As James Bevel put it, "Every time we march, Daley loses 10,000 votes--from the whites".[103]

Faced with a massive white backlash, the Mayor was understandably anxious to bring a halt to the open housing marches, but he still believed that the CFM could be "bought off" with a few minor concessions. The package offered by Daley on August 10 had "the ring of the ward healer's art:" an extra $50 million for the urban renewal programme; three hundred jobs as housing-project guards; and the employment of one black journeyman glazier by the

Chicago Housing Authority. The package was accompanied by a set of prepared quotes, to be released to the press upon King's signature; one of them began; "Today, Mayor Daley has again demonstrated his leadership by. . . ."[104]

None of these concessions touched upon the CFM's central demand: open housing. The marches continued, with increasing frequency: on August 14, they were staged in three areas simultaneously.[105] More negotiations took place. This time, the Chicago Real Estate Board offered to "urge" its members to shun racial discrimination, and comply with the fair housing order issued by Governor Otto Kerner on July 13. Savings and landing associations also promised to "urge" a policy of non-discrimination upon their members. The leaders of the CFM, however, wanted concrete action, such as immediate compliance with the city's fair housing ordinance, and prompt action on complaints by the city's human rights commission.[106] In addition, real estate boards should cease their legal fight against open housing legislation, and suspend the licenses of realtors who refused to post their listings on a non-discriminatory basis.[107] Finally, the CFM sought a commitment from the city that public housing would, in the future, be dispersed throughout the metropolitan area.[108]

Compared with the movement's demands, the promises they had been offered were not "such as to warrant the end of demonstrations," said King.[109] On August 8, SCLC aide Jesse Jackson announced--apparently on his own

initiative--that the CFM was planning two simultaneous marches, one in Bogan and the other in Cicero.[110] Whites were horrified at this prospect. Cicero was notorious for racist violence. In 1952, Governor Adlai Stevenson had had to call out the National Guard to put down an anti-integration riot. Fourteen years later, not a single black person lived in Cicero. If a march were held there, predicted Cook County Sheriff Richard B. Ogilvie, the violence would "make Gage Park look like a tea-party."[111] The city obtained a federal injunction that severely restricted the number, size, and timing of marches.[112] Convinced, however, that King would defy what he termed an "unjust, illegal, and unconstitutional" act, the city returned to the negotiating table and offered new proposals. The resulting "Summit Agreement" of August 26 was hailed by King as "far-sighted and creative;" Newsweek thought it "a solid vindication of Southern style nonviolent protest in a Northern city."[113]

Others, like Chester Robinson of the West Side Organization, were more skeptical: "We feel that the poor Negro has been sold out by this agreement."[114] The pact was full of vague promises that were obvious loop-holes. As the Chicago Tribune pointed out, the CREB refused to drop its suit against the city's fair housing law; how could it then honestly "remind its members of their duty to obey the ordinance"?[115] Privately, many SCLC staffers admitted that even if it were enforced,

that law was so weak that it would make little difference.[116] Even within the terms of the agreement, no method was devised of implementing it; there was no way of compelling the various parties to fulfill their promises. "The problem," said James Bevel, "is the follow-up."[117] Although the CFM set up a standing committee to monitor implementation of the agreement (setting the target at one per cent black occupancy in the suburbs by April 1967), the city refused to include this in the written agreement; it would not be bound by a time limit.[118]

Predictably, the city went back on its word. In October, a CFM report concluded that the city was taking no positive steps to carry out the agreement.[119] King promptly threatened more marches (saying that the Cicero expedition had merely been "postponed"), but it was an idle threat; the momentum and unity of the movement had already been broken.[120] Another follow-up report confirmed the non-implementation of the "Summit Agreement." It found that only one out of twenty-three completely segregated public housing projects had been integrated, and that this was more than offset by the creation of two new segregated ones.[121] After the failure of the SCLC winter voter registration drive, the city stopped even pretending: "There is no housing agreement," said Alderman Thomas Keane. "There were only certain suggestions put down and goals to be sought."[122]

III. WHY THE SCLC FAILED IN CHICAGO

The Desertion of White Liberal Support and Internal Disunity

Why did the SCLC fail in Chicago? More specifically, why did King halt the open housing marches to settle for a pact which so clearly lacked substance? Part of the answer was that the marches, although producing the kind of confrontation the SCLC had all along sought, also divided the leadership of the Chicago Freedom Movement, and alienated much of its white liberal support. That support had always been limited. While the bulk of the labour unions were firmly allied with the Democractic machine, two of them, the United Auto Workers and the United Packinghouse Workers, gave material assistance to the CFM.[123] In March, UAW regional director Robert Johnson had vowed that "The UAW is in this thing all the way. . . . Our men will be on the streets with King's people, and we will not stop until we have made this a better Chicago."[124] However, on August 11 Johnson joined with other labour leaders who, after meeting with Daley, called for an end to the open housing marches.[125] Archbishop Cody's volte-face was an even more serious blow. If the marches continued, he argued, serious injuries could well occur; "With a heavy heart," he asked that the marches cease.[126] Although the Catholic Interracial Council opposed Cody's position, the Archbishop's defection marked the breakup of the "coalition of conscience"

that King had laboriously constructed in Chicago. So widely-respected a figure could not be ignored. James Bevel, aware that a halt in the marches would break the campaign's momentum and dissipate its moral advantage, bitterly remarked that "If the bishop doesn't have the courage to speak up for Christ, let him go to the Devil."[127] Thus white liberal support crumbled at the very time that the movement was finally bringing effective pressure to bear upon the Mayor and the City Council.

Pressure to end the marches was intensified by a split within the movement's black leadership. The Agenda Committee of the CFM had long been divided over the relative merits of community organizing (self-help) and nonviolent direct action. The Rev. Arthur Brazier, head of the influential Woodlawn Organization, strongly favoured the former approach.[128] Both Brazier and the Rev. Carl Fuqua, chairman of the Chicago NAACP, argued against staging demonstrations in all-white areas. Such a tactic, they reasoned, would only provoke a "white backlash" that would redound to the benefit of conservative Republicans, thus increasing resistance to the movement's demands.[129] Later in the year, Fuqua characterized the SCLC as a group of "chronic protesters" who had accomplished "absolutely nothing."[130] (It should be pointed out that the Chicago branch of the NAACP was dominated by the Democratic machine.)[131] With the defection of white allies, and with intense opposition from within the lead-

ership of the CFM, King had no choice but to halt the marches.

Daley's apparent capitulation of August 26 was, in reality, the capitulation of the Chicago Freedom Movement. Rather than force Daley to the conference table, the erosion of white liberal and black support compelled King to settle for considerably less than half a loaf. The verbal militants of SNCC, CORE, and the West Side Organization accused King of "selling out." They failed to appreciate, however, that it was the chronic lack of black support and participation that brought about the premature curtailment of the open housing marches. In a city with a black population of one million, the turnout at meetings and demonstrations was meagre. The open housing demonstrations attracted between fifteen hundred and twenty-five hundred participants, over half of whom were white.[132] CORE and the West Side Organization could persuade barely two hundred people to march into Cicero.[133] "Freedom is not won by a passive acceptance of suffering," wrote King in 1967. "Freedom is won by a struggle <u>against</u> suffering. By this measure, Negroes have not yet paid the full price for freedom."[134]

<u>Problems of Community Organizing</u>

The work of the SCLC in the field of community organizing was crowned with some important successes. Jesse Jackson, with the help of a Ford Foundation grant,

built up the Kenwood-Oakland Community Organization in a slum area previously devoid of any overall neighbourhood organization.[135] Operation Breadbasket, also directed by Jackson, claimed to have won four thousand new or upgraded jobs by December 1966.[136] The East Garfield Park Community Organization was another local self-help group built from scratch. The EGPCO's signal success was a rent strike by the tenants of the Old Town Garden apartment complex. Eventually, with the aid of UAW lawyers, a housing contract was won.[137] This was justly considered a breakthrough, and by February 1967, thanks to the work of James Bevel, Meredith Gilbert, and Sam Smith, a dozen such contracts had been negotiated, covering some ten thousand tenants.[138] The SCLC continued to work in Chicago after the Summit Agreement. Stoney Cooks and a staff of twenty-four persevered in the work of community organizing.[139] The movement obtained $4 million in FHA-insured loans for the acquisition and rehabilitation of five hundred slum apartments.[140] With a grant from the Office of Education, the Chicago staff also undertook an adult education project, in conjunction with volunteers from Michigan State University.[141]

The efforts of the SCLC were less successful, however, in raising the political consciousness of Chicago's black population, the fundamental objective of community organization. This was partly due to severely limited

resources. Even so, King later admitted that the Conference had failed to commit itself to the kind of sustained, long-term effort that effective community organizing demanded.[142] Some of the SCLC staff, such as James Bevel and Jesse Jackson, displayed considerable aptitude for working in the Northern ghetto, but most were dispirited and demoralized by the resistance and apathy they encountered. "None of us wanted to spend another day in Chicago," admitted Andrew Young. "We wanted to return to the South, to familiar terrain."[143]

It was entirely natural that the idea of open housing marches should appeal to the SCLC, which was expert in the art of the dramatic demonstration. Once the direct action phase was launched, however, field workers were diverted from the task of community organizing, which suffered as a consequence.[144] Stoney Cooks, Bevel's successor as director of the Chicago project, believed that these two strategies, community organizing and direct action, were never adequately integrated into a single, coherent strategy.[145] Moreover, there were conflicting ideas as to the most effective method of community organization. One was to concentrate the SCLC's resources "in a specific but limited geographic location" (East Garfield Park); the other was to strengthen and promote the activities of the existing organizations that comprised the CCCO, using SCLC workers as "catalytic agents."[146]

Unfortunately, these two strategies were developed "on two separate and distinct levels," with the result that the SCLC spread itself too thinly.[147]

The SCLC made a special effort to make the black youth gangs join the nonviolent movement. For months, James Orange and Jimmy Wilson conducted nonviolent workshops with members of the Cobras, Vice Lords, and Blackstone Rangers.[148] King himself met with some of the gang leaders, in an attempt to prevent violent clashes with the police.[149] During May and June, James Bevel tried to stop the various gangs from fighting among themselves, and convert them into nonviolent demonstrators who would be able to "close down Chicago."[150] The SCLC's work with the gangs was by no means fruitless. Some of the gang-members became unofficial bodyguards to King, and the Blackstone Rangers worked to prevent the West Side riot from spreading to the South Side ghetto.[151] On the whole, however, the SCLC failed to harness the energies of the gangs to the nonviolent civil rights movement. Most were hostile to the idea of working alongside whites. King succeeded in persuading a few to accept nonviolence, at least as a tactic, but, as Coretta King recalled, "As he preached nonviolence to them, many of them still said, 'We believe in violence.'"[152]

The Political Dilemma of the SCLC

On March 25, 1966, King announced that he was lead-

ing a campaign against slums, not against Mayor Daley.[153] "City Hall was buzzing with joyous relief" when it heard this, for it meant that King would support neither Dick Gregory's bid for the Mayorship, nor the election of anti-machine Democrats.[154] King was reluctant to become involved in the treacherous quagmire of Chicago politics, and the SCLC had always been an ostensibly non-partisan organization. Nevertheless, although King believed that he was preserving the friendship of President Johnson, his declaration of political neutrality undoubtedly weakened his bargaining position vis-a-vis Daley. On July 10, King adopted a more aggressive posture, vowing to "register every Negro in Chicago of voting age."[155] The next day, after his second barren meeting with the Mayor, he promised that henceforth the campaign would be "more political," for the black vote "can and will be the balance of power in Chicago."[156]

Little was done to substantiate this threat until long after the Summit Agreement. In a series of bitter exchanges in November, Daley accused King of seeking to stir up a backlash vote against the Democractic party.[157] James Bevel angrily replied that although "there are a few Negroes who may feel that they are owned by the Democractic machine, at the same time there are a million suffering Negroes in this town."[158] As it became patently obvious that Daley had no intention of honouring the Summit Agreement, King announced an inten-

that such a strategy could not have defeated Daley in 1967.[165] But a political campaign to oust Daley was never a practical option for the civil rights movement. The movement could not afford to wait four years for results; it had to show immediate and visible gains if it were to arrest the spread of rioting, and the growth of black separatism. "We have got to deliver results--nonviolent results in a Northern city--to protect the nonviolent movement," said Andrew Young.[166] This explains why the SCLC's strategy in Chicago seemed to fall between two stools: a long-term strategy of community organization, and a short-term one of direct action. Daley countered the latter by coming to an agreement which he had no intention of implementing; as for the former, the CFM could not hope to match the efficiency of the Democratic machine. In any case, disagreement within the Committee for Independent Political Action (part of the CCCO) had ruled out a political assault on the machine even before King's arrival.[167] Nothing had come of Lawrence Landry's proposal for the formation of Freedom Democractic clubs, and "freedom elections" in fifty black wards.[168] Even if it had been wholeheartedly adopted, an anti-machine effort would have been extremely difficult. In William Dawson's First Congressional District, which embraced most of the South Side ghetto, the Democractic party employed one captain and two assistants in each of its 446 precincts--1,338

campaign workers.[169] The movement could not have matched the material benefits offered by the machine, nor combat the fear of losing those benefits by opposing the regular Democractic party. As one pastor put it, "Every welfare recipient is afraid to oppose the wishes of his precinct captain."[170] Against this, the SCLC's voter registration drive, conducted by fifteen workers and a budget of $18,000, was pathetically inadequate.[171] King might well apologetically explain that the drive had merely been "a trial run to learn methods."[172]

White Opposition to Open Housing

The immediate results of the Chicago campaign did not compare unfavorably with those of Birmingham or Selma. In all of these cities, negotiated agreements went largely unimplemented, and the SCLC issued threats of further demonstrations which failed to materialize.[173] However, as August Meier pointed out, local failures at Birmingham and Selma had succeeded in focusing "national and international attention on the plight of the Southern Negro, thereby facilitating overall progress" by means of federal civil rights legislation.[174]

King had hoped for a similar federal response to the Chicago campaign, saying "Our work will be aimed at Washington."[175] But the 1966 Civil Rights Bill failed, as "the once unbeatable civil rights coalition . . . fell apart in the Senate."[176] This was, wrote William Brink and Louis Harris, "the greatest single defeat suffered by

the Negroes . . . since 1954."[177]

By the time of the debate on the 1966 bill, there had been major riots in Watts, Cleveland, and Chicago. While these outbreaks hardly helped the bill's chance of enactment, they were not the cause of its demise. The defection of white support from the Chicago movement, and the defeat of the 1966 Civil Rights Bill were not reactions to black violence, but reflections of the depth and intensity of white opposition to open housing.

The term coined to describe white resistance to black demands ("backlash") was highly misleading for, as Thomas Pettigrew noted, "there is no evidence that these anti-Negro opinions have been recently adopted."[178] As early as July 1963--exactly the time when demonstrations were spreading to the North in the wake of the Birmingham campaign--Time was detecting "signs of dismay and hostility among Northern whites."[179] The white backlash was not, therefore, a fearful, defensive response to black rioting (there were no riots until 1964), but tenacious opposition to the basic goals of the civil rights movement in the North. Interpreting the results of its survey of white opinion, Saturday Evening Post concluded that "the white North is no more ready to accept genuine racial equality than the Deep South."[180]

"Nothing today more clearly indicates the residue of racism still lodging in our society than the responses of white America to integrated housing," King wrote after

the Chicago defeat.[181] In 1964, California's white voters had enacted a constitutional amendment (Proposition 14) which had not only repealed a mild fair housing law, but also forbade the passage of such legislation in the future.[182] Proposition 14, in effect, permanently legalized housing discrimination.[183] This blatantly racist measure had been passed over the opposition of all three religious denominations, the leadership of the labour movement, and more white liberals than had ever previously been mobilized on a civil rights issue.[184] By the end of 1964, nine Northern states had either defeated or repealed fair housing legislation.[185]

The demand for open housing seemed to rub raw the exposed nerve of Northern racism. "Where housing is concerned," wrote Thomas Pettigrew, "much of the subtlety which clothes racial prejudice in the North is lost-- even among the well-educated."[186] Middle-income suburbanites--a quarter of the total population--opposed open housing. Whilst professing sympathy for the civil rights movement, they were, in reality, "the strong, silent partner to overt anti-Negro sentiment."[187] Even more than the drive for school integration, it was the demand for open housing that mobilized the forces of Northern racism in a militant counter-attack on the civil rights movement.

In California, the leaders of religious denominations and labour unions had been powerless to "deliver" their members.[188] The passage of Proposition 14 exposed

the weakness of white liberalism, demonstrating it to be unrepresentative of white opinion. The 1966 Congressional and state elections made a similar point. Throughout the North, candidates of both parties exploited political racism and, in several states, men whom King labelled "political clowns" became governors or narrowly missed election.[189] The right-wing reaction was most pronounced in cities where militant open housing campaigns had occurred. Here, wrote the New York Times,

> One finds no sudden flash of feeling that could be described as 'white backlash! Instead, whites appear more prone to draw upon a considerable reservoir of prejudice against Negroes, to voice antagonisms that have lain there, just beneath the surface, all along.190

Open Housing and the Disintegration of the Civil Rights Movement

In 1961, James Q. Wilson argued that a "strategy of protest," based on demonstrations, would be ineffective against housing discrimination. Dramatizing the evils of housing segregation would achieve nothing, because "anti-Negro practices in real estate do not violate clear community norms as does violence. . . . no moral stigma attaches to the man who refuses to sell his home to a Negro."[191] It was typical of King to "attack the worst first" but, by making open housing the central demand of the Chicago campaign, he was choosing an issue that presented insuperable political obstacles. King, wrote William Brink and Louis Harris, ran "smack into the white

man's deepest prejudice."[192] The resulting defeat, the general white backlash, and the increasing political isolation of the black community seemed to undermine the very foundations of nonviolent direct action. Although White America had been prepared to curb the sadistic brutality of a Bull Connor or a Jim Clark, wrote King, "it had never been truly committed to helping him out of poverty, exploitation or all forms of discrimination."[193]

Open housing, of any civil rights issue, evoked the maximum amount of white opposition, but it did not, conversely, elicit a similar degree of support from the black community. James Q. Wilson noted in 1960 that black leaders were divided on whether to insist upon integration as a pre-requisite for material improvements for black people. Should they, for example, insist that public housing be located in white neighbourhoods, even at the risk of having no public housing at all? Or should black schools and homes be improved, even if this reinforced and perpetuated segregation?[194] In the early 1960's, the most militant black leaders believed that slum housing, inferior schools, unemployment, and job discrimination could never be eliminated without residential integration, and were prepared to sacrifice immediate improvements to this long-term goal.

For most Northern blacks, however, open housing was the longest of long-term goals; they considered better schools, better accommodation, and better jobs more urgent needs.[195] Moreover, the goal of housing integration

became increasingly identified with the ambitions of the black middle-class. Whatever progress were made in integrating the all-white areas, noted Wilson, "the great bulk of Negroes continue to live, and will continue to live . . . in the densely-populated all-Negro areas of the south and west sides of the city."[196] Writing at the same time, E.U. Essien-Udom agreed that "Most Northern lower-class Negroes do not share . . . the opportunities which integration 'victories' are supposed to bring them."[197] Black nationalism was not simply a pathological response to white rejection; it was, wrote A.James Gregor, an entirely logical reaction, in that integration did not alleviate the problems that afflicted the "Negro masses as distinct from the . . . semi-professional and white-collar" blacks. The strategy of integration, argued Gregor, was driving an economic, ideological, and spatial wedge between the middle-class black leadership and the lower-class black majority.[198] As expected improvements in employment, housing, and education failed to materialize, noted Kenneth B. Clark, lower-class blacks tended to see "the advances of the black middle-class as being at their expense," a perception that was exacerbated by the feeling that blacks who lived in white neighbourhoods had deserted their less fortunate brethren in the ghetto to adopt the cultural norms of white society.[199] "A favourite saying among Negroes now," commented James Farmer on 1964, "is 'So-and-so <u>used</u> to be

black."[200]

As the civil rights movement ran into the stone wall of white backlash, more and more blacks argued the need to work for immediate improvements, even within the context of the segregated ghetto. In the face of such white resistance, the strategy of integration seemed less and less relevant; it articulated an ultimate ideal, but it ignored the present-day reality. The theoreticians of Black Power, as well as such whites as James Q. Wilson, Lewis Killian, Joseph Alsop, Richard A. Cloward, and Frances F. Piven, argued that integration favoured the assimilation of a small number of individuals into white society at the expense of raising the collective standards of the black majority that remained, unfortunately but in fact, in the segregated ghetto.[201] The trouble with King's "Summit Agreement," said Chester Robinson of the West Side Organization, was that "it is a lot of words that give us nothing specific we can understand. We want it to say: apartments should be painted once a year; community people should have jobs in their community."[202] To leaders like Robinson, the Black Power concept--racial cohesiveness, the strengthening of black institutions, and the immediate improvement of ghetto conditions--was appealing and relevant. The goal of open housing, while revealing the depth of Northern white racism, contributed to the disintegration of the civil rights movement.

The White Backlash and Black Political Isolation

In 1951, Samuel Lubell had observed that the Democratic party was no longer a party of the "have-nots." The ethnic minorities that had attached themselves to that party in the 1930's were now the "new majority," and "no new economic gains can be promised any group of Democrats without threatening the gains of other Democrats."[203] The intensity of white resistance to the demands of the civil rights movement in the North demonstrated the truth of this analysis, and transformed what had been a North-South conflict into a "conflict of whites against Negroes across the whole nation."[204] The bulk of the Northern Wallace vote in the 1964 presidential primaries had come from Roman Catholic minority groups. These minorities had themselves experienced bitter discrimination. "They believe," wrote Thomas Pettigrew, "that Negroes are unjustly making rapid strides at their expense, helped-out by a too-generous federal government."[205] Newsweek found in 1964 that among Polish, Hungarian, Slovak, and Italian-Americans 61 per cent agreed with the proposition that blacks were getting a "better break" than they had had.[206] Although they had rallied around the Democratic banner in 1964, giving 72 per cent of their vote to Lyndon Johnson, they perceived black demands for massive government aid as a direct threat to their economic security. "Their articulated resentment," wrote James W. Carey, "is on the gut issue of economics: jobs, money and property

values." Proposals for compensatory treatment for blacks, such as the "Domestic Marshall Plan" of the National Urban League, were "simply not . . . salable to the white ethnic worker."[207]

In 1964, David Danzig believed that the potential for a mass defection of Roman Catholic voters from the Democratic party made blacks "more exposed to social reaction within the white community than . . . at any time since Reconstruction."[208] When open housing became a central demand of the civil rights movement, economic fears and racism coalesced. Brink and Harris found that while 52 per cent of all whites would be "upset" if blacks moved into their neighbourhoods, the percentage rose to 59 per cent among Irish Catholics, 62 per cent among Italian-Catholics, and 79 per cent among Polish Catholics.[209] By 1966, they wrote, "the defections from the Democratic party of the late-arriving Catholic minorities are crystal clear in state after state."[210] They reflected, wrote King, the tragically mistaken belief that black demands for change represented "a demand for privileges rather than . . . a desperate quest for existence."[211] The failures of 1966 had a profundly discouraging effect upon King, eroding his faith in the "great decent majority," and forcing him to conclude, sadly, that "the vast majority of white Americans are racist."[212]

CHAPTER VII

THE COLLAPSE OF THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT AND THE EMERGENCE OF BLACK POWER

"The Black Power slogan," wrote Martin Luther King, "was born from the wounds of despair and disappointment."[1] As Stokely Carmichael had predicted, the meagre and equivocal gains of years of unremitting struggle and sacrifice gradually undermined the basic assumptions of the non-violent civil rights movement.[2] Bruised, battered, and disillusioned by six years of work in the Deep South, SNCC rejected, in 1966, the philosophy of nonviolence, the strategy of coalition politics, the tactics of direct action, and the goal of integration with white society.

I. THE INADEQUACY OF THE CIVIL RIGHTS ACTS

Weak Enforcement and Southern Resistance

In August 1965, historian C. Vann Woodward argued that regarding civil rights, "Congress has just about fulfilled its rule. . . . Within the past year, Congress has put more teeth into the law, and more law on the book than in the whole period since 1965."[3] However, as King often pointed out, the recording of legislation is not necessarily the reality of reform. A few months later, Gene Roberts penned a more realistic appraisal: "the question now is not whether the Negro can win new legislation, but whether he can muster enough political strength

to . . . prevent the erosion of the gains he made when the revolution was at its peak."[4]

The 1964 Civil Rights Act had swept away segregation in public accommodations, thus removing the outward and most humiliating badges of the caste system in the South; but economic conditions--black poverty--remained.[5] Nor was the integration of public accommodations as significant a change as expected. In the poorest areas of the South, such as Lincoln County, Georgia, there were hardly any public accommodations to be integrated.[6] Even such famous victories as Birmingham had failed to bring about the kind of sweeping transformation hoped for by King, Fred Shuttlesworth, and the other advocates of nonviolent direct action. Paul Good visited that city over two years after the demonstrations of 1963. He found that the police force, the fire department, the judiciary, the board of education, and the city council were still all-white. Only thirty per cent of the adult black population was registered to vote. Movement leadership was divided, and its followers apathetic. "Birmingham today," wrote Good, "reveals some disquieting truths about the effect of the civil rights movement in the urban South."[7]

Lax enforcement of the Voting Rights Act added to the gloomy picture. This piece of legislation, wrote King, had been proclaimed as "the dawn of freedom and the open door to opportunity."[8] The Attorney General made it clear, however, that the federal government did not

feel obligated to actively encourage black voter registration.[9] "What was minimally required under the law," King argued, "was the appointment of hundreds of registrars and thousands of federal marshals to inhibit Southern terror." Instead, fewer than forty registrars had been appointed by July 1966.[10] By August, only forty-two of the nine hundred counties covered by the Act had received them. Seventy-nine counties with less than 25 per cent black registration still awaited federal examiners, and Georgia, which contained twenty-nine of these counties, had none at all until the Spring of 1967--a circumstance attributable to the influence of Senator Richard B. Russell.[11] "We are still a long way from the goal of full enfranchisement," reported the U.S. Civil Rights Commission in 1968.[12]

Gains in black voter registration were thus agonizingly slow: half a million names were added between 1964 and 1966, another half million over the next two years.[13] White resistance to black voting did not immediately decline after the passage of the Voting Rights Act. In the rural South, where local registrars "know the Negroes who try to register, and the jobs they hold on the plantation they 'belong' to," whites did not accept the passing of the old order with calm resignation: they resisted to the bitter end, clinging to the vestiges of segregation for as long as possible.[14] In August 1965, for example, the SCLC had initiated demonstrations

in Greensboro (Hale County), Alabama, which had shattered the traditional "paternalism" of black-white relations. But that paternalism had depended upon black acceptance of segregation; when segregation was challenged, "Hale County whites . . . reacted with revulsion and cold fury." Churches were burned, sharecroppers were evicted, credit was withdrawn, and servants were dismissed.[15] In places like Hale County, the Southern Regional Council observed, "contact between the races is a personal one, and so more painful when one tries to change patterns." White hostility was directed not only against those who actively participated in the civil rights movement, but against the black community as a whole, "so there is no foundation of respect, *anywhere [on the part of whites]*."[16] In Wilcox and Lowndes counties, Alabama, in West Feliciana Parish, Louisiana, and in a host of Mississippi counties, hundreds of families were evicted from their farms for attempting to register to vote--after the passage of the Voting Rights Act.[17]

Weak enforcement encouraged white resistance, and nowhere was this more apparent than in education. The 1964 Civil Rights Act had finally given the federal government the power to withhold funds from school systems that continued to maintain segregated schools. But the Department of Health, Education and Welfare accepted "freedom of choice" plans, thereby placing the burden of

school integration upon individual black parents and children, exposing them to all manner of white retaliation.[18] Many parents who filled out transfer forms changed their minds before the beginning of the school year.[19] In the cities of the South, "day-by-day torture of the Negro children by their schoolmates, teachers and administrators" led many more parents to withdraw their children from "white" schools.[20] In the countryside, wrote Glenda Bartley, "the threat that black children might eventually go to school with white children, brought a wave of terror unmatched since post-Reconstruction whites rode around in bedsheets."[21] The result was that in September 1965, only six per cent of black children went to school with white ones; in Mississippi, Alabama, and Louisiana the proportion was less than one per cent.[22] A year later, the South-wide figure was still only twelve per cent.[23] As New Republic commented, the federal government's acceptance of any desegragation plan offered by Southern school boards seemed to indicate a weak commitment to full integration.[24] Title VI of the Civil Rights Act turned out to be a thin stick rather than a heavy club. Only sixteen school districts had their funds terminated, and they were all ones that had flatly refused to submit any desegregation plan at all. "Not a single district in the South," wrote Gary Orfield, "was called to account for violation of its plan."[25]

Weak enforcement of school integration had a

disastrous effect on the already flagging morale of SNCC. With the American Friends Service Committee, SNCC had made a major effort, in the Autumn of 1965, to persuade black parents to send their children to "white" schools, and had closely monitored the disappointing results. It was to be SNCC's last effort in support of integration, and it only seemed to prove that civil rights laws that were the products of a fundamentally racist society were intrinsically flawed.[26] Pat Watters and Reese Cleghorn, surveying the overall impact of the civil rights movement in 1967, came to a pessimistic conclusion. "In some of the worst areas of the South," they wrote, "one would have to look hard in 1965 and 1966 to see much difference from the pre-1960 order of race relations. From public accommodations to the decade-old effort to desegregate schools, tokenism was the most that had been achieved anywhere."[27]

The Failure to Curb Racist Violence

In January 1966, the New York Times reported that twenty people had died in the South at the hands of white racists during 1965. This set a macabre record: fourteen had been killed in 1964, thirteen in 1963. Eleven of the 1965 killings had occurred in two states: Mississippi and Alabama.[28] By the end of 1966, nobody had been convicted for any of these murders.

These killings represented the tip of an iceberg

of white repression. The Southern Regional Council recorded 122 "acts of intimidation, reprisal and violence" that had taken place between September 1965 and February 1966.[29] Most of them had been directed against blacks trying to integrate "white" schools, or attempting to register to vote. Evictions, firings, arson, harassment, and police brutality were still rife; the age of random white violence against blacks and "righters" clearly had not passed. Nor would it pass, believed King, until Southern blacks and white civil rights workers were "shielded from terror and oppression by reliable, alert government protection."[30] In 1964 he had urged that federal marshals be employed to combat racist violence, and, when nonviolent demonstrators had been attacked by police-dogs and tear-gas during the St. Augustine campaign, he had telegraphed Lyndon Johnson to send marshals.[31] But his request was declined, and the Justice Department continued to insist that it had no constitutional power to curb violence in the South.

When King heard of the acquittal of LeRoy Collins (the alleged murderer of Viola Liuzzo), he vowed to undertake a new campaign in Alabama, in order to highlight the need for legislation that would make murder a federal crime. If white racists could continue to kill civil rights workers with impunity, "all the progress we have made up to this point in the South" would be seriously threatened.[32] Flanked by John Lewis of SNCC,

and Charles Morgan of the ACLU, Andrew Young announced the new drive on November 5.[33] Five days later, King outlined the objectives of the campaign: a law providing for uniform, non-discriminatory jury selection; and a law making homicide a federal felony.[34] The Episcopal Society for Cultural and Racial Unity, the National Council of Churches, and other organizations pledged their support.[35]

The SCLC-led campaign was concentrated in Greene County, Alabama; it was the fifth poorest county in the nation, and had a black population of 80 per cent.[36] Daily demonstrations, led by Hosea Williams, commenced in Eutaw on November 10, and during the next month they spread to Greenville and Selma.[37] In the first week of December, King toured the Alabama Black Belt in order to encourage the marches and, after hearing him preach, 350 marched in Eutaw, and 250 in Greenville.[38] The campaign, however, was not a success. It had little active support from SNCC, which was busying itself with an intensive voter registration drive, in preparation for the 1966 Democratic primaries.[39] In addition, SNCC was opposed to the SCLC's tactic of using local demonstrations for the purpose of promoting national legislation.[40] The SCLC campaign was badly planned, and the local people were not put in the picture.[41] Although the marches were not without violent police reactions (especially in Greenville), there was no Selma-type brutality to command the

national headlines.[42] The Greene County Sheriff's department discovered that the most sensible tactic was to let the marchers march--all day long if they wanted to. Thus, as the Richmond Afro-American observed, the "campaign for 'equal justice' turned into a daily, almost uneventful series of strolls to the county courthouse."[43] In his annual report, Hosea Williams ascribed the failure to a combination of white repression and black apathy.[44]

President Johnson did, in fact, introduce the kind of legislation that the *SCLC* desired but, tied to the open housing provision of the 1966 Civil Rights Bill, it was never enacted.[45] Its failure, plus the refusal of the federal government to use marshals for law enforcement in the South, meant that "the old way of life--economic coercion, terrorism, murder, and inhuman contempt--has continued unabated."[46] As during Reconstruction, the intent of the law was being subverted by a national reluctance to curb Southern white resistance. As the Southern Regional Council pointed out, this resistance should have surprised nobody: historically, it had always flourished "to the degree that the enforcement arms of the federal government allowed it."[47] Lax enforcement of the 1964-5 legislation, together with the failure of the 1966 civil rights bill, meant that Southern white violence went virtually unchecked. When the killers of Viola Liuzza and Jonathan Daniels went free, wrote King, "many of us

wept at the funeral services for the dead and for democracy."[48]

II. THE COLLAPSE OF THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT IN THE SOUTH

The Final Campaigns: Birmingham and Granada

It was one of Martin Luther King's most consistently-held beliefs that while legislation could "declare" rights, "only when people themselves begin to act are rights on paper given life blood."[49] Demonstrations were still needed, for they were "part of the process . . . of law enforcement."[50]

The truth of this assertion was illustrated by the implementation of the Voting Rights Act. Although the total number of federal registrars was hopelessly inadequate, demonstrations were often successful in gaining easier registration procedures, or bringing about the arrival of federal examiners. The Birmingham demonstration of early 1966 clearly underlined the advantages of persistent pressure, in the form of nonviolent direct action. In that city, less than a third of the adult black population was registered to vote.[51] In December 1965, with the Democractic primaries--and the chance to unseat Governor Wallace--only a few months away, the *SCLC* inaugurated a county-wide registration campaign, with the help of Northern volunteers.[52] In the New Year, Fred Shuttlesworth and Hosea Williams led daily demon-

strations. A telegram demanding federal examiners was sent to the Attorney General, and easier registration procedures were demanded from the city: "We want registrars in Negro neighbourhoods," said Williams, "and we want them at night, when Negroes aren't working."[53] By January 12, the SCLC had conducted fifteen marches in nine days.[54] Eight marches (and a considerable amount of police violence) later, twenty-three federal registrars were sent to Jefferson County. The next day, one thousand blacks were registered, over 14,000 during the following month.[55]

The need for a vigorous civil rights movement was also illustrated by the Meredith March of June 1966, which passed through dozens of towns that had never experienced any movement activity, and where "rural Negroes . . . remained at the mercy of white power exerting absolute dominion over their lives."[56] One such town was Grenada. Its police department, post office, schools, and churches were still completely segregated. And of an adult black population of 4,000, only 700 were registered to vote.[57] Communication between the races was non-existent; white ministers who had attempted to form a bi-racial committee were sacked and forced out of town.[58]

When the Meredith March passed through Grenada, King and Floyd McKissick extracted a promise from the city to hire six black voting registrars, and extend registration hours into the late evening.[59] A thousand black

names were swiftly added to the voting rolls.[60] When the marchers departed, King left eight SCLC field workers behind, who would encourage Grenada's black population to challenge every aspect of segregation and white supremacy.[61] Predictably, with King and the national news out of the town, Grenada's white leaders acted decisively to crush the nascent movement: on July 3, all the SCLC workers were arrested and jailed, along with forty-one others who tried to protest.[62] Further demonstrations were violently dispersed by the Highway Patrol; a car carrying two civil rights workers was sprayed with bullets; and the SCLC's list of demands was rejected with the statement: "There will be no concessions of any type or degree to anyone whatsoever, likewise there will be no acceding to any such demands."[63] For a while it seemed as if the city's uncompromising stand had worked, and that fear had been re-instilled into the black population: when Hosea Williams appealed for volunteers to test the city's public accommodations, only fifteen people responded.[64]

The Grenada Movement did not die. During the following month, the SCLC team, led by Hosea Williams and Leon Hall, conducted a direct action campaign to break down the city's virtually intact wall of segregation. It was met with the traditional Mississippi combination of mob violence and police brutality. On July 8, a street rally of 1,200 people was dispersed with tear-gas; the

next day, 300 marchers were trapped in the city square and showered with bricks and bottles hurled by a white mob, while the police impassively looked on.[65] When the new school year began, eighty-seven black children and parents were attacked while attempting to enter a "white" school, which a federal judge had ordered to desegregate.[66] Only five policemen were on duty that morning.[67]

As Andrew Jaffe wrote in New South, the racist violence of Grenada "did not elicit even the superficial national response that the Movement had come to expect."[68] Nevertheless, thanks to the intervention of the federal judiciary, the rights of Grenada's blacks were at last beginning to be recognized. At hearings in Oxford, Judge Claude Clayton, appalled by the violence, strongly condemned the city's failure to protect civil rights marchers and black school-children: "I am astonished that such violence . . . could have occurred as many times as it did with so little reaction on the part of the public officials. . . . The problem lies at the very door of the sheriff's office."[69] As a result of Clayton's intervention (supported by a Justice Department brief), Dr.King, Andrew Young, and Hosea Williams were able to escort 160 black children into one of the city's "white" schools, protected by 275 white officials.[70] It was a small but significant victory and, after the shocking violence of September 12, there were even signs of remorse from some of Grenada's white citizens, three hundred of whom issued

a statement promising they would use "all of our influence to the support of law and order"--including court-ordered school integration.[71] The Grenada Movement was also responsible for the arrival of four federal voting registrars who, once they agreed to move their offices to the black neighbourhood, were enrolling two hundred people a day.[72] In his 1967 annual report, King was able to claim that Grenada's "non-destructive rebellion" had led to the attainment of forty of the movement's fifty-three original demands.[73]

The Decline of the Civil Rights Movement in the South

In February 1967, the New York Times reported that "the civil rights movement has collapsed in broad areas of the South, and is fighting what seems to be a last-ditch battle for survival in its few remaining spheres of influence."[74] Two years earlier, in the Summer of 1965, SNCC, CORE, and the SCLC had between them deployed one thousand field workers in the region, most of them heavily concentrated in the Deep South, and North Carolina.[75] In 1966, the number had declined to 300 and, at the beginning of 1967, fewer than fifty remained. SNCC, CORE, and the SCLC had only about a dozen full-time field workers each, scattered throughout the eleven Southern states.[76]

SNCC was the civil rights movement's first, and most costly casualty. In late 1964, SNCC had expanded to more than 200 full-time field workers, and an equal

number of part-time volunteers.[77] But its new strength was never fully utilized. Plans were made for a 1965 project, along the lines of the 1964 Mississippi Summer Project, but considerably wider in scope, covering selected Black Belt counties from Texas to Virginia.[78] However, this ambitious plan was never implemented, owing to a combination of internal factionalism, interracial tension, disillusionment with the concept of leadership, and sheer "battle fatigue."[79] SNCC's failure to follow up its 1964 project was the start of an organizational decline which perceptibly slowed the momentum of the civil rights movement as a whole. By the Summer of 1966, SNCC's staff had fallen to 135. Of this number, only about eighty were field secretaries, and little more than half of these were actively engaged in local organizing.[80] Its espousal of Black Power, its opposition to the U.S. involvement in the war in Vietnam, and its support of the Palestinian cause cost SNCC virtually all of its white financial aid. By December 1966, its staff had shrunk to eighty.[81] One of the driving-forces of the civil rights movement was on the verge of extinction.

With the parallel decline of CORE, only the SCLC, of the direct action organizations, remained a significant force in the South. Hosea Williams supervised a staff of 105 which, in 1966, conducted voter registration drives in seventy-nine counties.[82] This staff, however, included only five full-time field organizers, the rest being part-

time subsistence workers.[83] The Chicago campaign had led to an inevitable contraction of SCLC manpower in the South and, like SNCC, the SCLC suffered as a result of its anti-war stand. (In May 1967, the Conference was forced to reduce its total staff from 150 to eighty-five.)[84] Writing at about this time, Pat Watters and Reese Cleghorn pronounced the civil rights movement "dead, or dormant."[85]

The decline of the civil rights movement, and the federal government's commitment to only token enforcement of civil rights legislation meant that "an erratic pattern of racial progress and recalcitrance" characterized the South.[86] Desegregation of public accommodations, voter registration, and school integration were all considerably easier where there were strong and active local movements. Even when the immediate results of civil rights campaigns were negligible, such drives were beneficial because, firstly, they created black community organizations that functioned as vehicles for political action; and secondly, they penetrated the barrier of fear, instilling the idea that white authority could be challenged. No town could ever be the same after a march, a demonstration, or a sit-in. These forms of direct action, the symbolic defiance of white supremacy, planted the seeds of a black political renaissance. The apparently inconclusive SCLC demonstrations in Eutaw and Demopolis, for example, challenged the belief that "government is white folks' business, and that the election of black

officials is against the natural order."[87] They paved the way for the election of blacks in Greene County in 1969, and for virtually complete black political control by 1971.[88] Similarly, the Meredith March led to local movements in Batesville, Belzoni, and Grenada. Demonstrations in Batesville were quickly snuffed out, but the Belzoni movement resulted in the integration of restaurants, the hiring of blacks in local stores and factories, and an increase in black voter registration.[89] The Grenada Movement, in addition to the gains cited above, also led to a black running for city council in 1967--the first such attempt since Reconstruction.[90]

Unfortunately, with the sudden and rapid decline of SNCC and CORE, and the shift of SCLC personnel to the North, the political activation of myriad black communities was indefinitely delayed. "The trouble is," said Vernon Jordan in 1967, "the Movement never reached most counties in the South."[91]

The Collapse of the Movement and the Development of Black Political Power

It was in the area of voter registration and political education that the collapse of the civil rights movement was felt most keenly. There were, of course, many local civic and political organizations, as well as hundreds of NAACP branches, which conducted successful voter registration drives unaided by the larger civil rights groups. Such organizations, however,

were concentrated in the Upper South, and certain Deep South cities such as Atlanta and Savannah. In these areas, voter registration was relatively easy. Intense, violent white opposition to black voting was largely confined to Alabama, Mississippi, south-west Georgia, and parts of Florida and Louisiana. It was here that local black organizations tended to be weakest, and most needed the support of SNCC, CORE, and the SCLC.

The entry of these organizations into Deep South communities, invariably resulted in the formation of new political groups. As Donald Matthews and James Prothro pointed out, fear, economic dependence, and the small size of the black middle-class, severely narrowed the "social bases of leadership recruitment" in the Deep South.[92] Here, the field workers of SNCC, CORE, and the SCLC provided a surrogate middle-class, encouraging the growth of local leadership, and acting as catalysts for the development of structured community action.

It was in counties where there were both federal examiners and strong local movements that voter registration was most easy.[93] The existence of such movements was an important criterion for the assignment of federal registrars. John Doar, explaining government policy, argued that if federal registrars were sent to every county that was covered by the Voting Rights Act, "the [black] public would believe that Federal examiners are a substitute for active local organizations." This

would be "counterproductive as far as bringing Negroes out of the caste system."[94] The collapse of the civil rights movement hampered the growth of such groups, relaxing the pressure for forceful and thorough implementation of the Voting Rights Act.

The accumulation of registered voters was only the first staging-post on the long road to political influence: the techniques of political action also had to be mastered. Candidates for office had to learn complicated party rules, intricate nominating procedures, and complex election laws. Similarly, ordinary voters needed instruction in how to fill in a ballot paper or use a voting machine, how to "split" a ticket, and how to use a "single-shot" vote. SNCC, CORE, and the SCLC had taught these procedures, informed people of their political rights, and provided, or provided access to, legal expertise. Raw votes alone were insufficient to attain political power. "Southern Negroes," wrote Matthews and Prothro, "must <u>create</u> their <u>own</u> political organizations before they can become a significant force in Southern politics."[95] The demise of the civil rights movement made this task immeasurably more difficult.

<u>The 1966 Democractic Primaries: The Triumph of Political Racism</u>

It was one of Martin Luther King's firmest beliefs that once the walls of segregation had tumbled, Southern poor whites would end up on the same side of the

political fence as blacks. Eventually, they would realize that "the same forces that oppress Negroes in American society oppress poor white people."[96] This was not just a Utopian dream of King's. Eminent historians such as C. Vann Woodward and Dewey Grantham detected the beginnings of such a political realignment, and the 1964 national elections seemed to indicate that it was becoming a reality.[97] Lyndon Johnson's smashing electoral triumph showed, in King's opinion, that the politics of race in the South was being splintered by the "strain of economic deprivation which cuts across caste lines." Already, wrote King, poor whites and blacks, both propelled by similar economic interests, were participating in a de facto political alliance; soon such alliances would be "frankly acknowledged."[98]

The 1966 Democractic primary in Alabama would be a testing-ground for this kind of realignment. It was Alabama's first election in seventy years in which blacks could freely vote. It would also offer a clear-cut choice between Lurleen Wallace, wife and puppet of the racist demagogue, and Richmond Flowers, a racial moderate. Flowers had personally prosecuted the alleged killer of Jonathan Daniels, had investigated the activities of the Ku Klux Klan, and had condemned the behaviour of the Alabama state troopers of Al Lingo. Flowers also openly sought black support.[99]

Alabama was the SCLC's spiritual home, the main

source of its strength, and the scene of such victories as Selma, Birmingham, and Montgomery. It was, therefore, natural for the SCLC to take a special interest in the forthcoming primary. Its pre-election strategy, formulated by Hosea Williams, called for a "Spectacular Task Force" to conduct an intensive voter registration drive, invigorated by a tour of the Black Belt by King, in the Winter of 1966. It would be a two-pronged drive. Voter registration and political organization would be concentrated in eight Black Belt counties, with a view to the election of black officials. At the same time, the SCLC would try to defeat Wallace "by undermining his strongholds in urban areas" such as Birmingham, Mobile, Montgomery, and Tuscaloosa. Hopefully, the arrival of federal examiners would facilitate the drive.[100]

After election day, "A lot of high hopes built on the new Negro vote in the South came crashing down," wrote Pat Watters.[101] Flowers, who had courted the black vote, was left with only three per cent of the white vote.[102] He carried most of the black-majority counties, as well as the state's eight "whitest" counties--a reflection of the Populist tradition of the north Alabama hill country. Wallace's strength was concentrated in the small towns throughout the state, where blacks were fifteen to twenty per cent of the population, and where black voter registration was only forty-two per cent. The

civil rights movement had neglected these areas, having concentrated, as dictated by limited resources, on counties with large black majorities.[103] "It would be a mistake to suppose that segregationist sentiment in Alabama is the last gasp of a dying and archaic system," wrote William Brimk and Louis Harris, "actually, it is showing more strength than ever."[104]

It was a similar story in Mississippi and Georgia, where John Bell Williams and Lester Maddox sailed to victory on the winds of white supremacy. In these states, as in Alabama, blacks found themselves politically isolated. Their major allies were not poor whites, but upper-class whites who disapproved of the inflammatory racist demagoguery of Wallace, Maddox and Williams.[105] Race, evidently, was still the over-riding issue in Southern politics, and lower-class whites showed little inclination to abandon their vociferous opposition to black equality. Numan V. Bartley and Hugh D. Graham saw in these events a clear parallel with the events of the 1890's when, with the "Solid South" threatened by the emergence of a two-party system based on class, the Bourbons had use racism to destroy the interracial alliance that was being fostered by Populism.[106] The results of the 1966 elections seemed to demonstrate that the kind of black-poor white alliance envisaged by King in his Montgomery speech of 1965 was, in the words of Frank Millspaugh, "hopelessly illusionary."[107]

SNCC had already ceased to think in terms of re-forming the Democratic party. The 1966 elections confirmed what SNCC already knew, that, as Stokely Carmichael put it, the Democratic part "didn't mean LBJ, but a crew of racist bullies and killers."[108] Blacks were politically isolated, and were best advised to make a virtue out of necessity by forming their own, independent political parties, along the lines of the Lowndes County Freedom Organization. In 1965 and 1966, SNCC workers tried to emulate the LCFO example in a dozen Alabama Black Belt counties, encouraging blacks to boycott the Democratic primaries, form independent "freedom" parties, and nominate their own candidates for the November general election.[109]

The SCLC was sharply opposed to this strategy. "We don't want no part of it," said Hosea Williams. "Will Negroes treat white folks the way white folks treated them? . . . We can't go pitting race against race."[110] But the massive Wallace vote showed that, like so many other Southern institutions, the Democratic party was "for whites only" and that, regardless of what blacks might want, whites were pitted against them. During the Meredith March, an SCLC worker criticized "Black Power" on the grounds that "you'll end up with whites hating Negroes and vice versa." His opponent, a SNCC supporter, replied, "Whites do already."[111]

III. THE DECLINE OF PHILOSOPHIC NONVIOLENCE

Philosophic Nonviolence and the Early SNCC

When SNCC was formed in 1960, it pledged itself to "the philosophical or religious ideal of nonviolence as the foundation of our purpose, the pre-supposition of our faith, and the manner of our action."[112] Many of the original SNCC activists were profoundly stirred by the philosophy of Gandhian nonviolence as a means of converting the oppressor. This was especially true of those who had joined SNCC through the Nashville Student Movement, where they had come under the influence of the Rev. James M. Lawson, a man strongly committed to philosophic nonviolence. Lawson had come to a synthesis of Christian and Gandhian ideas at about the same time as King.[113] Many of the early leaders of SNCC--John Lewis, Diane Nash, James Bevel, Marion Barry, Cordell Reagan, and Bernard Lafayette--had attended his workshops on nonviolent direct action.[114] Lawson taught that "your flesh could suffer like Christ's out of love," John Lewis recalled in 1967. "You have to understand this to understand what SNCC was in the beginning."[115] Thus Charles McDew could say that SNCC opposed segregation "not only because it disadvantages the Negro, but because it blights everything it touches. . . . you cannot draw a man near to you by striking him a blow."[116] Similarly, Diane Nash saw the movement as "applied religion," because it was

motivated by love, and strived toward a " beloved community."[117]

Even in these early days, however, observers noted that most of the students tended to view nonviolence in a pragmatic light.[118] SNCC's original statement of purpose was the work of the small but strongly committed Nashville group. Many of the student delegates, according to Martin Oppenheimer, "never saw the statement; many others did not understand it, much less agree with its full implications."[119] There were also those, as King admitted, to whom "violence presents itself as a quick, effective answer."[120]

The Erosion of Philosophic Nonviolence

A majority in SNCC always regarded nonviolence as a practical, rather than a philosophical commitment. Most of the staff, wrote Julian Bond in 1963, saw it as "an effective means of protest," not a "way of life and a philosophy of living."[121] Nevertheless, philosophic nonviolence was an important influence in the early SNCC, despite the fact that its adherents were in the minority. By 1964, however, philosophic nonviolence was being eroded by constant exposure to white violence and brutality. More and more came to regard nonviolent direct action as a coercive weapon. John Lewis, one of the strongest devotees of nonviolence, summed up the new mood in SNCC: "There's a growing--and it's fast growing--trend towards 'aggressive nonviolent action.' You no longer walk quietly to the paddy-

wagons and happily and willingly to jail."[122] Few, either in SNCC or CORE, now believed that nonviolence worked by "converting" the oppressor, and those who did so (usually inexperienced Northern white volunteers) were regarded as pathetically naïve.[123]

Most activists came to a point when it became psychologically impossible to love the enemy. John Lewis was savagely beaten at Selma, and knew "that it was my last demonstration .... The body gets tired. You put out so much energy and you saw such little gain. Black capacity to believe white would really open his heart. . . was running out."[124] Stokely Carmichael had never been a believer in philosophic nonviolence. During a training session for the Mississippi Summer Project volunteers, he had engaged in a heated debate about nonviolence with James Lawson, a committed believer. There were limits to human love, argued Carmichael. There came a time when "you get tired of being beaten and going back the next day for your beating for five days in a row."[125] By 1965, the majority of SNCC workers agreed with Carmichael.[126] Later, he recalled when even tactical nonviolence became impossible for him, after a demonstration in Montgomery during the Selma campaign. A black woman had been knocked down by a fire-hose; demonstrators were being trampled by the horses of the sheriff's posse: "Suddenly, everything blurred. I started screaming and I didn't stop until they got me to the airport. That day I knew I could never be

hit again without hitting back."[127] Similarly, for James Forman, "the brutality of the blue-shirted Alabama police and the club-swinging posse of Big-Belly Jim Clark" put an end to his faith in nonviolence.[128]

For Carmichael, Forman, and hundreds of others, nonviolence became not only psychologically impossible, but also psychologically demeaning. Psychiatrists who took part in the Mississippi Summer Project, noticed that many of the SNCC workers were suffering from emotional exhaustion, a kind of "battle fatigue" that led to "chronic withdrawal," bitterness, and hatred of whites.[129] Psychiatrist Alvin F. Poussaint concluded that their condition was exacerbated by nonviolence. The unnatural suppression of their anger toward whites led to ulcers, nervous disorders, and outbursts of violent aggression against white civil rights workers.[130] In view of the continuous harassment and violence that was the lot of most SNCC workers, it was not surprising that, as Robert Moses noted in 1964, "the majority of the students are not sympathetic to the idea that they have to love the white people that they are struggling against."[131]

By 1965, the ideas of Malcolm X, especially his call for retaliatory violence, were finding a sympathetic audience in SNCC.[132] Soon afterwards, the works of Franz Fanon provided an intellectual basis for the complete rejection of nonviolence. Hatred of the oppressor, Fanon wrote, far from being undesirable, was psychologically

healthy for an oppressed people, especially when that people was a coloured one.[133] Nonviolence came to be perceived as a demeaning philosophy, which disguised the aggressive militancy of the movement, making it "acceptable" to whites. Nonviolence placed a rigid moral straight-jacket on the movement, demanding a standard of ethical behaviour that had been expected of no other ethnic group. Criticism of nonviolence was not confined to SNCC and CORE; it affected all segments of the black population, especially in the North. As Immamu Barake (then LeRoi Jones) put it in 1964: "King's lie is that there is a moral requirement to be fulfilled before entrance into the secular kingdom of plenty."[134] Black Power deemed it degrading to even attempt to combat white racist stereotypes by displaying love for the oppressor.

The Terms of the Debate

Although SNCC eventually came to identify Black Power with guerrilla warfare, and a world-wide revolution of coloured peoples, the original slogan was not a call to actual violence, but a rejection of philosophical violence.[135] This was an important distinction which was, however, lost upon the white majority. The core of the debate was not whether the civil rights movement should become violent, but whether or not nonviolence--in the sense of love for the oppressor--should remain its central philosophical principle. "Nonviolence is not the opposite of violence,"

said James Meredith. "What really happened with nonviolence, they took the Negro as he was in 1960 . . . and they attached the name 'nonviolent' to him, and thereby gave a legitimacy to a particular movement. This changed nothing. . . . The Negro was never violent."[136]

For most SNCC workers, nonviolence was simply irrelevant. As one of them put it,"The assumption of nonviolent protest is that the other guy has a conscience you can appeal to. That's just not true in Mississippi."[137] When SNCC shouted "Black Power," it was not declaring that blacks would kill whites, but that blacks should have the absolute right to decide their own tactics, on a pragmatic basis, like any other ethnic group in American society. When whites inflicted violence upon blacks, they were not entitled to expect love in return. "White people must be made to understand," wrote Carmichael, "that they must stop messing with black people, or blacks will fight back."[138]

IV. THE GROWTH OF BLACK SEPARATISM IN SNCC

The Coalitionist Strategy of the Civil Rights Movement

Black Power, as well as rejecting philosophic nonviolence, urged blacks to shun alliances with whites. Bayard Rustin, King's unofficial political adviser, was the most articulate exponent of coalitions with white groups. The superordinate goal of the civil rights movement should be, in Rustin's opinion, the realignment of

the American party system, and this could only be done by maximizing white support for the movement. The civil rights coalition had the potential to become "a coalition of progressive forces which becomes the effective political majority in the United States."[139] This coalition, embracing blacks, white liberals, church groups, and organized labour, had defeated the Dixiecrat-Republican alliance to pass the Civil Rights Act and the Voting Rights Act, as well as the other legislation that made up the "Great Society" programme. The expansion of the black electorate in the South would consolidate the coalition, further weakening the reactionary influence of the Southern segregationists (whose influence extended far beyond the South).[140] If such a coalition strategy were pursued, Rustin believed, the power of the Southern conservatives would be so weakened that the Democratic party would be transformed and radicalized. Like the Social Democracies of Western Europe, it would embrace the poor and working-classes of all races in a majority for radical social change.[141]

SNCC's radicalism came from "having been frustrated in seeking change within the framework of the existing society."[142] SNCC had originally pursued the strategy of reforming the Democractic party, in the hope that it could become more responsive to the needs of blacks.[143] Most of SNCC's work was in the field of voter registration; its major effort was the creation of the Mississippi

Freedom Democratic Party, which sought official recognition from the national Democratic organization. Yet, in its David-and-Goliath battle to displace Dixiecrat power in the South, SNCC found itself physically attacked, politically isolated, and bereft of significant support from white liberals, organized labour, the Democratic party, and the federal government. Opposed though he was to Black Power, Rustin had to confess that "it took countless beatings and twenty-four jailings--that, and the absence of strong and continual support from the liberal community--to persuade Carmichael that his earlier faith in coalition politics was mistaken."[144] Black Power contended that no white group, not even the supposedly radical ones, could be relied upon for support.

Socialists and Organized Labour

One of the most obvious differences between the "Old" Left and the "New" Left, was the latter's lack of faith in organized labour. It was not a blind, unreasoning distrust. In its early days, SNCC had been impressed by Bayard Rustin's emphasis on the primacy of economic issues in the struggle for black equality. Rustin had been a moving force behind the Young People's Socialist League, which had a strong chapter at Howard University, a breeding-ground of black radicalism. Howard's Nonviolent Action Group, a SNCC affiliate that included Stokely Carmichael, Courtland Cox, Bill Mahoney, and

Cleveland Sellers, was impressed by Rustin's Socialist back-ground, as well as by his unpretentious willingness to engage in informal "rap" sessions with them.[145] They soon discovered, however, that Rustin's Socialism led to a stifling dependence upon organized labour.

At SNCC's Fourth Leadership Training Conference, held at Howard in November 1963 (and organized by Rustin), speakers from the labour movement and the Socialist Party were prominent. It soon became clear, however, that the Socialist tendency to emphasize class, as opposed to race, did not speak to the realities of racism in the Deep South, and led to the mildest kind of reformism.[146] Rustin, and veteran Socialist leader Norman Thomas proclaimed that full employment should be the primary goal of the movement. Yet Thomas's specific proposals amounted to little more than New Deal-type public works programmes.[147] The implication of the Socialist line was that white and black workers were equally disadvantaged, an assertion that seemed absurd to SNCC, which spent its time attempting to tear down barriers that were so obviously racially specific. Paul De Brul of the Industrial Union Department of the AFL-CIO even suggested that SNCC's Freedom Election in Mississippi had been a waste of time. Instead, SNCC should have backed the election of "moderate" Rubel Phillips for the Governorship. SNCC found this suggestion both stupid and immoral. Not only was Phillips a segregationist, but also only a handful of black Mississippians

could vote. Such a tactic would do nothing to advance the fight to abolish barriers to black voting. As Elizabeth Sutherland noted, although most of the speakers were Socialists, "it was hard to tell that from anything they said. They failed to impress the SNCC workers."[148]

These differences in outlook were less important in bringing about SNCC's estrangement from organized labour than the latter's failure to practice what it preached. The craft unions were notorious for their "almost total" exclusion of blacks. In Chicago, for example, where over a million black people lived, there was not a single black glazier, or sheetmetal worker; and there were only two hundred black electricians.[149] In 1959, angered by the failure of the AFL-CIO to uproot such discrimination, A. Philip Randolph had formed the Negro American Leadership Labor Council, a move supported by Rustin.[150] At the same time, even the most liberal unions, such as the International Ladies Garment Workers Union, were shown to be practicing discrimination.[151] To SNCC, labour appeared more of an enemy than a natural ally.

Fear of Co-Optation

"The New Left of the early sixties, and many of the black radicals as well," wrote Tom Hayden in 1970, "were pre-occupied not with the danger of fascist repression but with that of liberal co-optation."[152] It was

largely for this reason that SNCC became increasingly reluctant to work within liberal coalitions. The independent politics of Black Power was a logical consequence of this attitude.

SNCC found that liberals constantly sought to curb its militancy, moderate its demands, and channel its energies for the benefit of the Democratic party. After the 1963 March on Washington, SNCC developed an almost hysterical distrust of what James Forman called "the labor-liberal syndrome."[153] The March, which vetoed the use of direct action and censored John Lewis's speech, convinced SNCC that its radicalism would be fatally compromised if, through regular collaboration, it became absorbed by a liberal coalition.[154] The formation of the Council on United Civil Rights Leadership, in June 1963, intensified these fears.[155] In an attempt to impose a kind of collective leadership on the civil rights movement, the NAACP began to "Red-bait"SNCC, demanding that it disassociate itself from such "subversive" groups as the National Lawyers' Guild. SNCC was attacked for its stand against the war in Vietnam and, increasingly, the CUCRL became a forum for NAACP attempts to pressure the other civil rights organizations, especially SNCC, to become more "moderate" and "responsible."[156] SNCC's rejection of the NAACP-inspired moratorium on direct action in the period before the 1964 Presidential election, signalled its belief that the interests of the Democratic party

and the interests of black people did not coincide; and that the path of "moderation" led, inevitably, to the trap of co-optation.[157]

The Failure of Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party challenge

The creation of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party was an attempt to put Rustin's coalition theory to the test. If the Democratic party were to become a radical force in American politics, "The liberal must be forced to choose between the Negro's support and that of the Dixiecrats."[158] The SNCC-inspired challenge of the MFDP presented such a choice in a clear-cut way. The challenge to the regular Mississippi delegation was based on four, indisputable points: that the regular party systematically excluded blacks; that it had repudiated the national party platform, rejected the national party's loyalty oath, and refused to campaign for the national Democratic ticket.[159] "Our ultimate goal," wrote Cleveland Sellers, "was the destruction of the awesome power of the Dixiecrats. . . . With the Dixiecrats deposed, the way would have been clear for a wide-ranging distribution of wealth, power and priorities throughout the nation."[160]

If it were to be successful, however, the MFDP challenge would need the support of powerful party leaders, men like David Lawrence of Pennsylvania, Wayne Morse of Oregon, Robert Wagner of New York, and Richard J. Daley of Chicago.[161] Lyndon Johnson determined to prevent the

unseating of the regular delegation and, to this end, intense pressure was exerted upon those liberals who were backing the MFDP challenge. In addition, the FBI carried out "surveillance" of the MFDP and its supporters. "By means of informant coverage, by use of various confidential techniques," and "by infiltration of key groups by the use of undercover agents," the FBI was able to prevent the seating of the "illegal" delegates, and "advise the President in advance" of the plans of the MFDP supporters.[162]

Bayard Rustin later argued that SNCC and the MFDP had been unwise to reject the compromise eventually offered by Hubert Humphrey. But SNCC regarded the offer (two non-voting delegates) as a token, not a genuine compromise.[163] They had already accepted the compromise worked out by representative Edith Green, whereby members of both delegations would be seated if they agreed to take a loyalty oath to the national platform and ticket.[164] Johnson, however, was utterly opposed to barring any of the regular delegates, even if they refused to take such an oath.[165]

The MFDP challenge had, in fact, presented an opportunity for the kind of political realignment advocated by Rustin, King, and the other proponents of the coalition strategy. But, as Sam Bottone wrote, their "support for Johnson has led to the abandonment of their own goal."[166] The desertion of white liberal support made the MFDP challenge SNCC's last attempt at coalition politics.

Its failure destroyed the little that remained of SNCC's confidence in the "ultimate reality of national political institutions."[167] It seemed to demonstrate, as Stokely Carmichael put it, that "black people . . . could not rely on their so-called allies."[168] The defeat was SNCC's final, desperate attempt to "work within what they called 'the system'." After Atlantic City, SNCC could no longer believe that the Demcratic party, or the federal government, could speak to the needs of the poverty-stricken, oppressed, and disfranchised blacks of the Deep South.[169] The defeat led directly to the all-black Lowndes County Freedom Organization, and to the separatist politics of Black Power.[170]

V. SNCC AND THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT: FROM REFORM TO REVOLUTION

When Bayard Rustin asserted that the Democratic party was the "party of progress, the New Deal, the New Frontier, and the Great Society," SNCC replied that it was also the party of George Wallace, James Eastland, Lester Maddox, and James H. Gray.[171] To SNCC, the influence of these men, and others of their ilk, was palpable: in the appointment of federal judges who were committed segregationists; in the failureof the Civil Rights Commission to hold hearings in Mississippi; in the Administration's refusal to resolutely attack segregation; and in, above all, the federal government's adamant refusal to curb police brutality and private violence in the South. These failures destroyed

SNCC's faith in the legitimacy of the federal government; eroded its commitment to nonviolence; and killed its belief in the feasibility of change within the existing structure of society.

The Federal Government and the Albany Campaign

The Albany campaign demonstrated that when the federal government assumed a posture of "neutrality", it effectively aligned with the segregationist status quo. Without federal intervention, local police could crush demonstrations through the technique of mass arrests. By allowing this kind of action the federal government was turning a blind eye to national law and Supreme Court decisions. The first people to be arrested in Albany were integrated groups that were testing the order of the Interstate Commerce Commission that banned segregation in interstate transportation. But, despite the fact that these arrests "violated an express federal ruling," the government took no action.[172] A pattern of arbitrary arrest was established which eventually broke the Albany Movement. The only helpful move from the Justice Department was an amicus curiae brief to oppose the city's request for a permanent injunction against demonstrations.[173] Eventually, a federal court ruled against the movement: the judge was one of President Kennedy's segregationist appointees, "an old-line Talmadge supporter."[174]

When a temporary truce was announced on December 18, 1961, Albany Chief of Police Laurie Pritchett was the recipient of a telegram from Robert Kennedy, which congratulated him on his "nonviolent" handling of the demonstrations. The New York Times and the Atlanta Constitution echoed the praise, for Pritchett had kept order by peaceful arrests. But, as the Georgia Council on Human Relations pointed out, "many of the arrests have been made when no threat to public safety existed . . . The only thing the Chief preserved was the segregationist status quo."[175] The Southern Regional Council likewise observed that Pritchett's methods had been far from praiseworthy, and advised the Justice Department not to "overpraise public order" in the future.[176] Pritchett's distaste for overt brutality was not shared by the law enforcement officers who beat up five movement leaders during 1961 and 1962. The widespread existence of police brutality in southwest Georgia was not difficult to prove or document; all it took to recognize it was "a willingness to face reality."[177] Albany was the beginning of a bitter political education for many SNCC activists. "As the years passed," wrote James Forman, "it became clear that the federal government was a partner in the crimes against black people."[178]

The Federal Government and the Mississippi Voter Registration Drives

SNCC was encouraged by the federal government to

conduct a voter registration drive in Mississippi, and believed that the Justice Department had promised some form of protection in the likely event of white racist violence.[179] Later, the Department denied having given such an assurance. Certainly, no firm, written pledge was given but, as Harold Fleming of the Southern Regional Council saw it, "because of the Kennedys' view of political reality," they had encouraged SNCC's belief.[180]

In May 1962, civil rights workers publicly told of their harrowing experiences in the voter registration campaign. Robert Moses recounted his short and violent sojourn in Amite County, and described the death of Herbert Lee, one of the movement's first fatalities.[181] Two days of testimony vividly highlighted "the widespread use of dogs to terrorize Negroes; the lawlessness and sadism of Southern police officials;" and "the inability of the FBI to do anything about police brutality."[182] But the inquiry had no effect upon government policy, which was one of non-intervention.

The shooting of James Travis, and the narrow escapes of Robert Moses and Randolph Blackwell, led the civil rights movement to intensify its campaign to bring about federal intervention. The Voter Registration Project (under whose auspices SNCC was working) announced a "saturation" registration campaign in Leflore County, where the shootings had occurred.[183] "The time has come," wrote VEP

director Wiley Branton, "to pick up the gauntlet."[184] White acts of violence and intimidation had made Constitutional rights "virtually inoperative" in Mississippi. "The peace of the United States is broken by the lawlessness in Mississippi," wrote Branton. "The federal government has an obligation, which it is not fulfilling, to restore it."[185] Only once did the Justice Department intervene, persuading the city of Greenwood to release from jail eight civil rights workers. As usual, however, there was a quid pro quo with the segregationists: the Department agreed to drop its suit to enjoin the authorities from interfering with voter registration.[186]

The Greenwood project ground to a standstill. Two years of SNCC activity had added a mere 3,871 black names to the voter rolls in the state. In the Autumn of 1963, the VEP admitted temporary defeat and suspended further funds for Mississippi. There could be no progress there "without massive federal action."[187] White violence continued, unabated. The toll in the 1964 Summer Project was six murders, thirty-five shootings, eighty bombings, and one thousand arrests.[188] The kind of opposition SNCC faced was "a concerted . . . galvanized, organized onslaught of total [white] community resources."[189] The Southern Regional Council pleaded for some kind of federal intervention: "It is not, after all, radical or extreme to affirm that anarchy is intolerable."[190] But the Justice Department, while expressing sympathy, especially for the

relatives of the murdered civil rights workers, apologetically explained that it did not possess the authority to interfere in the internal affairs of a sovereign state.

Southern Violence and the Constitution

In Mississippi, as in Alabama, southwest Georgia, and northern Louisiana, the fear of the black community was the civil rights movement's first obstacle: fear of police repression, private retribution, and economic retaliation. The absence of federal restraints on white violence, official and unofficial, made that task doubly exacting. Howard Zinn spoke for many in SNCC when he argued that the movement could make little headway until "the stone wall of police power" were broken by some kind of federal presence in the South.[191]

The Justice Department consistently claimed that the federal government simply did not have that kind of power. According to Assistant Attorney General Burke Marshall, the federal nature of the Union, as defined in the Constitution, placed severe restraints on the police powers of the national government. In the first place, the maintenance of law and order was the proper duty of the individual states. When federal rights were violated by state actions, the federal courts could only provide remedies on "an individual case-by-case basis." Marshall denied that the federal government could initiate suits to "protect federal rights guaranteed to individuals," strike down unconsti-

tutional state laws, or prevent "abuse of police power."[192] In the second place, if the federal government interfered in matters that were traditionally reserved to the states, it would "lead inevitably to the creation of a national police force."[193]

These arguments appeared to justify Robert Kennedy's claim that he "lacked the power" to prevent violence in Mississippi; and that the disappearance of three civil rights workers (later found dead) was "a matter for local law enforcement."[194] Experts on Constitutional law, however, agreed that they were spurious. Astonished by Kennedy's claim of executive impotence, twenty of the nation's most eminent law professors cited the specific statutes that accorded the federal government the power to protect Constitutional rights wherever and whenever the states failed to do so.[195] Such rejoinders were to no avail. Although the long-discredited theory of federalism (a theory that had traditionally been pressed into service by the South to defend slavery and segregation) provided an excuse for federal inaction, it was not its cause. "The true answer," wrote Watters and Cleghorn, "was to be found in the remaining power of white supremacy in Washington."[196]

Burke Marshall admitted that the restraints of federalism were frustrating for those who were trying to establish federal rights in the South, and noted that many civil rights workers were losing their faith in the law.[197] When SNCC, in 1966, turned from reform to revolution, nobody

should have been surprised. As Harold Fleming put it: "Americans have been terrorized, beaten, gassed, unfairly arrested and persecuted, bombed, and on occasions killed in attempts to exercise constitutionally-protected rights."[198] As early as 1963, SNCC had asked "Which side is the federal government on?"[199] Another three years of exposure to Southern violence answered the question, and "the movement's ally became its enemy."[200]

The Meredith March and the Black Power Slogan

Mississippi in 1966 was the perfect setting for the birth of Black Power. A year earlier, at Selma, a white attack upon nonviolent demonstrators had outraged public opinion, prompting President Johnson to propose the Voting Rights Bill, and promise that "We shall overcome." Now, however, the conscience of the nation seemed to be asleep; the time-tested SCLC formula was no longer working. As the marchers passed through Philadelphia, local whites threw rocks, and assaulted them, while law officers stood by and watched.[201] King's request for federal protection drew an unmistakeably cool response: "The President knows it is going to take a lot of effort to produce understanding down there," said his Deputy Press Secretary.[202] Two days later, in Canton, state troopers attacked the assembled marchers to their camp-site, lobbing tear-gas grenades and clubbing whoever they could lay their hands on. In its violent intensity, this unprovoked aggression equalled the

Selma attack of the previous year. This time, however, the Attorney General chided the marchers for "trespassing" on private property.[203]

These events reflected how little federal civil rights legislation had actually changed the Deep South. They also demonstrated the irrelevance of philosophic nonviolence, and the unreliability of the government. The Johnson administration's position of cold "neutrality" undermined King's philosophy at precisely the time SNCC was deliberately challenging it. "I've heard nothing from President Johnson," King complained. "It's terribly frustrating."[204] As Paul Good wrote, "If the President had wanted to boost Black Power, he could not have chosen a better way."[205] The Meredith March showed that Southern blacks were politically isolated and physically defenseless.

Although SNCC introduced the slogan, the mood behind it had long been in the air. Black Power was not a clearly thought-out political strategy: it was a "mood of answering anger, of retaliatory violence among Negroes of the South" that was detected by observers long before the Meredith March; a mood that echoed "the white lawlessness so long the South's disgrace."[206] It was the feeling expressed by Charles Evers, (brother of the murdered NAACP leader) who, standing at the base of the Confederate memorial in the middle of a "white" park, shouted angry warnings to a group of armed white men:

If you don't bring [trouble] . . . you won't get it. But if you bring it, you're going to get it. We're tired of your bombings and beatings. We've talked with you and we've prayed for you, and now we're going to sit and wait for you. 207

CHAPTER VIII

THE SCLC AND THE WAR IN VIETNAM

Black Americans have always been placed in a painful quandary by the wars of their country. Moved, like whites, by feelings of patriotism and loyalty, blacks have also regarded serving their country as a way of establishing a claim for legal and political equality. They fought, however, under a triple disadvantage. In the services, they were despised, segregated and only reluctantly called upon to bear arms. When they did fight, their bravery and participation was ignored or quickly forgotten. Finally, their loyalty, courage and endurance never persuaded whites to reward them with equal treatment. "In every American war" wrote Robert W. Mullen, ". . . black soldiers have paid a price in flesh and blood that remained denied."[1]

This contradiction between the white profession of freedom and the white practice of racial domination was starkly illuminated by the rise of American imperialism. In the Philippines, black soldiers found themselves fighting a people whom their white compatriots called, "niggers."[2] In Mexico, Haiti, Korea, the Dominican Republic, and Vietnam the United States, inheriting the role of the European colonial powers, fought wars to stifle the independence of non-white peoples. It is not surprising that black leaders have been profoundly disturbed by such

wars, recognizing that racism and imperialism go hand in hand. Frederick Douglass, in an earlier age of "Manifest Destiny" denounced the Mexican war as "disgraceful, cruel, and iniquitous." A generation later, his son, Lewis, berated the Philippines war in a similar manner, charging that "the expansion of the United States means extension of race hate . . . and the grossest injustices."[3] When, in February 1967, Martin Luther King bitterly denounced the United States' involvement in Vietnam, he was, as Herbert Aptheker noted, "pursuing a deeply-embedded tradition in Afro-American history."[4]

King's Moral Perceptions

Unlike his friends James Lawson and Bayard Rustin, King was not, strictly speaking, a pacifist. Reinhold Niebuhr's critique of pacifism had convinced him that violent resistance to tyranny could be justified under certain circumstances, and he came to regard himself as a "realistic" pacifist. Two factors, nevertheless, persuaded him to view war as "obsolete". Firstly, Gandhi had demonstrated that nonviolent resistance eliminated the need for violence.[5] Secondly, the invention of nuclear weapons made war too dangerous ever to serve any good. The alternative to casting violence between nations "into unending limbo" was to risk "plunging the whole of mankind into the abyss of annihilation."[6]

King's attitude toward communism was characterized by a similar compromise between realism and idealism.

Philosophically, he rejected Marxism's materialism, humanism, ethical relativism, and elevation of the state over individual liberty. Marxism, nevertheless, vividly illuminated the failures and defects of capitalism; it passionately opposed poverty, racism, imperialism, and social inequality; its wide appeal among the poor peoples of the world could not be explained away by conspiracy theories. Such a philosophy, King believed, "can never be defeated by the use of atomic bombs," because it was "poverty, insecurity, injustice, and racial discrimination" which constituted the "fertile soil in which the seed of Communism grows and develops."[7] Liberty and democracy would flourish only where such conditions were abolished, where capitalism was reformed and rendered more humane, and where society was infused with a "daring, revolutionary commitment to Christ" so that justice and equality could be made real.[8]

There were additional reasons for King's opposition to the war in Vietnam. In common with most other black Americans, he abhorred colonialism. It was a system which meant that in Africa alone, "two hundred million black men and women. . . . were dominated politically, exploited economically, segregated and humiliated."[9] He had enthusiastically hailed the independence of Ghana, and looked forward to the complete extinction of the European empires. The emergence of an independent Africa was an inspiration to the civil rights movement, and it gradually became apparent

that the United States was trying to prevent a similar historical development in south-east Asia.[10] The analogy between African independence, Vietnamese independence and their own struggle for civil rights was clear to many black Americans. Finally, King, as a minister, felt it his duty to be unconstrained by conventional morality and political wisdom. He had a prophetic role, emphasized by the award of the Nobel Peace Prize, to work unstintingly for the cause of world peace. It was his firm conviction that, "all the people of the world. . . . must evolve for all human conflict a method which rejects revenge, aggression and retaliation."[11]

I. THE ESCALATION OF THE WAR AND THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT

King's 1965 Statements

In an address to the Virginia State Conference of the SCLC on July 9, 1965, King declared that he could no longer remain silent while the war in Vietnam was being intensified. "All I know is that the war in Vietnam must be stopped," he went on. "There must be a negotiated settlement." Urging the civil rights movement to take a forthright stand against the war, he saw "no reason why there can't be peace rallies like we have freedom rallies."[12] A month later, at the SCLC's annual convention, King called for an "unconditional and umambiguous statement" from the President that he was willing to enter into good faith negotiations with North Vietnam and the

Viet-Cong.[13] King also suggested that the President, as a gesture of good will, "consider halting the bombing of North Vietnam" and, as his own contribution to the achievement of peace, King offered to make a personal appeal for negotiations to Ho Chi Minh, the leaders of South Vietnam, the Soviet Union, and the United Nations.[14]

King's first venture into the field of foreign policy was criticized from all around. His own organization refused to support his stand, arguing that the SCLC was primarily a civil rights organization, and that its resources were inadequate "to assume the burden of two major issues." While respecting King's right to speak against the war, the board insisted that he speak as an individual, and that the SCLC's efforts "in mass demonstrations and action movements be confined to the question of racial brotherhood."[15]

The reaction of the press to King's peace proposals was even more unfavourable. "When he applied his doctrine of non-violence to Vietnam," observed the Nation, "he was deluged by threatening editorials and cartoons, and by slanted news stories."[16] The consensus press opinion was that King was not qualified to speak out on such issues, and would only harm the civil rights cause if he insisted on continuing to do so. King, charged Time, was "confusing the cause;" civil rights leaders, argued Roy Wilkins, did not have "enough information on Vietnam" to make an informed opinion.[17]

King's statements could not have been more unwelcome

to President Johnson, who was determined to escalate the war. Acting on Johnson's orders, United Nations Ambassador Goldberg warned King that his interventions were threatening the success of important peace initiatives.[18] To make it crystal clear that King was speaking out of turn, Senator Thomas Dodd, a close friend of the President, said that by airing his views on matters about which "he has absolutely no competence to speak," King had "alienated much of the support he previously enjoyed in Congress."[19] This combination of pressure and persuasion was, for a time, successful. "They told me I wasn't an expert in foreign affairs, and they were all experts." King later recalled. "I knew only civil rights and should stick to that."[20]

The disapproval of the President, the press, other civil rights leaders, and his own organization were compelling reasons for King to back away from his outspoken stand against the war. There was also the danger that he might alienate a considerable portion of his black support. In a 1966 opinion poll, Newsweek disclosed that only 18 per cent of its black sample believed that the United States should withdraw from Vietnam; black attitudes toward the war appeared to reflect white attitudes.[21] Richard Rovers found that at the 1966 White House Conference on Civil Rights, the war was not a major issue among the black delegates, and that many blacks held the military in esteem; they saw the armed services

as "the Negro's high school and Harvard," and the provider of employment and training in an institution that was less overtly racist than the larger society.[22] Even Bayard Rustin, Quaker, pacifist and conscientious objector, urged blacks to take advantage of the opportunity provided by the armed forces to "learn a trade, earn a salary, and be in a position to enter the job market on their return."[23]

Black leaders like Rustin and Whitney Young were also afraid of alienating the support of President Johnson, a man whose help was crucial in determining the pace of black progress. "Johnson needs a consensus," Young told SNCC's James Forman. "If we are not with him on Vietnam, then he is not going to be with us on civil rights."[24] That Johnson had been a friend of the civil rights movement was undeniable, and much political credit accrued to him in the black community as a result of the Civil Rights Act, the Voting Rights Act and the War on Poverty. King had considerable respect for Johnson, a respect, bordering on affection, that was shared by the SCLC. It was understandable that in the summer of 1965, with his "We Shall Overcome" speech fresh in everyone's mind, King should have given Lyndon Johnson the benefit of the doubt on Vietnam.[25]

SNCC's Opposition to the War

It was left to SNCC to become the first civil rights organization to publicly oppose the war, and it was

SNCC that bore the full brunt of the ensuing condemnation and persecution. On the issue of Vietnam, as in the Deep South, SNCC cut out the path which the SCLC would later follow.

Until 1965, wrote James Forman, "most of us [in SNCC] --including myself--considered the war not irrelevant, but simply remote."[26] In that year, however, Robert Parris (formerly Robert Moses) left SNCC to devote himself to the peace movement, serving on the "Committee of Unrepresented People."[27] Parris was one of the first leading figures to directly link the war in Vietnam to the civil rights struggle in the Deep South. Racism and oppression were not peculiar to the South, he argued, they were endemic to the entire United States. It was not, therefore, difficult to see that the United States was fighting against freedom in Vietnam, just as it was fighting against freedom in the South. The task that confronted the civil rights movement was to define its relationship to the world-wide freedom movement, of which the revolution in Vietnam was a part. Moreover, it was not enough for people to oppose the war as "individuals," nor was it sufficient for civil rights groups to pass formal resolutions condemning the war: they needed to act against the war, and they needed to question the basic assumptions of American foreign policy--including the assumption that foreign policy was the exclusive domain of the President and his advisers.[28]

By the end of 1965, most SNCC workers agreed with Parris that Vietnam was a "colonialist war," but fear of repression was restraining SNCC from stating its conclusions publicly.[29] When Tuskegee student leader Sammy Younge, Jr. was murdered in January 1966, SNCC cast away such fears. Younge's death, and the deaths of a dozen other civil rights workers, threw into relief the contradiction between the professions and practices of the American government. Claiming to be fighting for freedom in Vietnam, that government would not enforce free elections and the rule of law at home. On examination, the SNCC statement argued, this apparent contradiction disappeared, for "our work has taught us that the United States government has never guaranteed the freedom of oppressed citizens . . . our country's cry of 'preserve freedom in the world' is a hypocritical mask behind which it squashes liberation movements" like the National Liberation Front.[30]

The reactions to SNCC's statement showed that the civil rights movement was badly divided over the war. The NAACP and the National Urban League denounced the statement; CORE issued a statement of its own which, although less strident in tone than SNCC's, affirmed that "the escalation of that war is wrong;" and King, on behalf of the SCLC, refused to condemn the statement while limiting his remarks to a defense of the right of dissent, including the right to be a conscientious objector.[31] Defending Julian

Bond, who was being denied his seat in the Georgia legislature for having endorsed SNCC's position, King told his congregation that "This was a man who dared to speak his mind. This was a man who dared to be different."[32]

The Dilemma of the SCLC

SNCC's stand posed a severe dilemma for King. One SCLC worker recalled that "he was in real agony about it, and he kept saying that he was going to have to speak against it [the war] . . . that it was something that he had to do."[33] Yet his earlier statements had incurred the wrath of the President, and the SCLC was still divided over the war. Vietnam was acting as a wedge that was widening the split between the conservative and militant wings of the civil rights movement, leaving the SCLC in the middle. The conservatives, wrote Charles Fager, had "hastily scrambled aboard the Johnson escalator." Now that SNCC and CORE were risking public condemnation and financial ruin by opposing the war, King's silence was becoming "louder and more painful to those who have followed him thus far."[34]

King could not afford, however, to commit the SCLC to an anti-war position. In Chicago, he was labouring to construct a broad coalition of civil rights, liberal, labour, and religious groups. Unity among these groups on a civil rights issue such as open housing was difficult enough; a peace consensus in addition would be impossible. Nevertheless, throughout 1966, King spoke out against the

war to selected audiences. In the New Year's Day issue of the Chicago Defender, he defended his right, and affirmed his duty to speak out against the war. "As a minister," he wrote, "I cannot advocate racial peace and non-violence for black men alone." Peace was not merely a foreign policy question to be left to the President: it was "a matter of human rights," a moral issue that was "God's business" and, therefore, "yours and mine."[35] Two months later, in the same newspaper, King expressed his growing horror at "a war in which children are incinerated by napalm. . . . a war mutilates the conscience."[36] In May, King agreed to serve as a co-chairman of a new anti-war group, Clergy and Laymen Concerned About Vietnam. Sending a message of support to a peace rally in the capital, he asserted that "This confused war has played havoc with our domestic destinies."[37] Although muting his opposition to the war, he was especially concerned that those who held anti-war opinions should not be intimidated. "There is a terrible attempt to silence dissenters," he complained in the spring, "and to make those who dissent appear to be traitors. These people confuse dissent with disloyalty, and silence many who fear being called traitor if they stand against the war."[38]

Gradually, the SCLC expressed public disapproval of the war. At its 1966 annual board meeting, it accused government policy of having become "imprisoned in the destiny of the military oligarchy" of South Vietnam, a

vicious dictatorship that was crushing opposition elements among the student, Buddhist and Roman Catholic communities. "The moment is now opportune and the need urgent," the board resolved, "to reassess our position and seriously examine the wisdom of prompt withdrawal." This was the first time that the SCLC had formally recorded its opposition to the war.[39] Once again, however, the staff and board were moving too fast for the affiliates. At the SCLC's annual convention in August, the board called for unilateral de-escalation on the part of the United States, arguing that "the war is corrupting society from within and degrading it from without." This resolution, however, was never presented to the full convention. Clearly, there was still stiff opposition to committing the Conference to the anti-war cause.[40]

The War and the Erosion of the "Great Society."

"It is the greatest of mistakes to mix domestic civil rights and foreign policy," commented Paul Anthony of the Southern Regional Council when he heard of the SCLC Vietnam resolutions.[41] Anthony believed that the war need not have an adverse effect on domestic social programmes, that the United States could afford both "guns and butter." Whitney Young summed up such thinking when he said, "I do not agree with those who say we cannot support massive domestic programs without an immediate cessation of the war in Vietnam."[42] The logic of

"guns and butter" was also apparent in the "Freedom Budget," a proposal published by the A. Philip Randolph Institute in October 1966. The brain-child of Bayard Rustin and A. Philip Randolph, the Freedom Budget proposed full employment, a guaranteed minimum income, the elimination of ghettos within a decade, and greatly improved public education and health care. To achieve these ambitious goals, the Freedom Budget advocated an increase in federal expenditure of $18.5 billion per annum for the next ten years. The framers of the Freedom Budget did not regard the war in Vietnam as an obstacle to its implementation. The conflict between the War on Poverty and the war in Asia, they claimed, was "not a real one. . . . no effort we are making anywhere in the world has any basis except to defend and advance the frontiers of freedom."[43]

When the War on Poverty was first launched, black leaders saw it as a promising and encouraging beginning to a massive government effort to put blacks firmly on the path to economic equality with whites. King called the poverty programme "preliminary and experimental;" Whitney Young said that unless the programme were rapidly expanded, "then I'm out of business."[44] In 1966, however, Congress reduced the budget of the Office of Economic Opportunity from $2.2 billion to $1.7 billion, and cut the funding of the community action programmes by a third.[45] The 1966 budget, wrote Erwin Knoll, left "no doubt that

the Great Society is missing in action."[46] It was not difficult to locate the cause of these cut-backs. "Because of Vietnam," admitted the director of the Office of Economic Opportunity, "we cannot do all that we should or that we should like to."[47]

The events of 1966--the defeat of the Civil Rights Bill, the "white backlash" and the cuts in the War on Poverty--convinced King that "guns and butter" was a dangerous and illusory concept. "While it may be technically true . . . that you can have guns and butter," he explained, "it is a fact of life that where your heart is, there your money will go, and the heart of the Administration is in that war in Vietnam."[48] It was plain to King that the war had divided the civil rights movement, siphoned off white support, and created a climate of political reaction which permitted Southern segregationists and Northern conservatives to stifle further domestic reform. In October, he warned that cuts in social spending constituted "an open invitation to riots, to despair, to bitterness."[49] Testifying before the United States Senate at the end of the year, he pointed out that "the war on poverty is not even a battle, it is scarcely a skirmish. Poverty . . . and social progress are ignored when the guns of war become a national obsession. . . . The bombs in Vietnam explode at home; they destroy the hopes and possibilities for a decent America."[50]

II. THE SCLC'S COMMITMENT TO THE PEACE MOVEMENT

James Bevel and the Spring Mobilization

Many of King's colleagues in the SCLC were already involved in the peace movement. In February 1966, a group of Conference workers formed the Southern Coordinating Committee to End the War in Vietnam; it included the Rev. James Lawson, Dr Robert L. Green, Harry Boyte, and John Barber.[51] It was James Bevel's commitment to the peace movement, however, that most influenced King. In January 1967, Bevel took a leave of absence from the SCLC to direct the newly-formed Spring Mobilization Committee to End the War in Vietnam, an organization chaired by veteran pacifist A.J. Muste.[52] Bevel was selected, said Muste, in order to encourage "greater participation of civil rights organizations." Hopefully, Bevel would be able to persuade King to support the Mobilization.[53]

Like King, Bevel had become convinced that the civil rights movement would be stymied as long as the war continued. He regarded America's domestic turmoil as a kind of divine judgement on her complicity with evil in Vietnam: "The Lord can't hear our prayers here in America because of all the cries and moans of his children in the Mekong Delta, and that is all He can hear as long as the war continues, so forget your prayers until the war is over, America."[54] Bevel's mystical, nonviolent ideology enabled him to attract a wide array of support for the

Mobilization, which would climax in a mammoth demonstration in New York. Bevel appealed for all those who opposed the war to forget their political differences and come together in the broadest possible peace coalition.[55] Following a policy of non-exclusionism, he welcomed the support of the Marxist Left. "I just never get into political arguments," he said, "since they usually don't make sense. The things that make most movements effectual are those things that are undebateable. Gandhi said 'we need salt' and you just can't argue with that."[56]

It was in January 1967 that King decided to intensify his opposition to the war. The depth of Bevel's commitment to the peace cause made a profound impression on him. "Here was one more sign," wrote David Halberstam, "that a bright and passionate friend judged Vietnam more important than civil rights."[57] As always, however, King's decision was a personal one. The Rev. Bernard Lee, King's personal assistant, recalled being with him in an airport en route to Jamaica. King was reading magazines:

> He froze as he looked at the pictures from Vietnam. He saw a picture of a Vietnamese mother holding her dead baby, a baby killed by our military. Then Martin just pushed the plate of food away from him. I looked up and said, 'Doesn't it taste any good?' and he answered, 'Nothing will ever taste any good for me until I do everything I can to end that war'. . . . When we got back from Jamaica that is what he did. 58

King's Campaign Against the War

On February 25, 1967, King addressed the Nation

Institute on the subject of "The Casualties of the War in Vietnam." That war, fought in the name of security and freedom, threatened the United Nations Charter, the principle of self-determination, the right of dissent, the Great Society, and "the prospect of mankind's survival."[59] American foreign policy, he asserted, was "supporting a new form of colonialism, . . . We are presently moving down a dead-end road that can only lead to national disaster."[60] A month later, he announced that he would henceforth "take a much stronger stand" against the war, and revealed his intention to address peace rallies in Chicago and New York. On March 25, in Chicago, King led his first peace demonstration, marching alongside Dr Benjamin Spock. At the concluding rally, King urged the 5,000marchers to "combine the fervor of the civil rights movement with the peace movement. We must demonstrate, teach and preach until the very foundations of our nation shake."[61] On April 4, he delivered his most celebrated statement on the war, "Beyond Vietnam," and, eleven days later, he spoke to a throng of a quarter of a million people outside the United Nations building in New York, sharing the platform with Spock, Bevel, Stokely Carmichael, and Floyd McKissick.[62]

King's campaign against the war was not confined to speechmaking; he also busied himself encouraging the formation and growth of various peace groups. At the end of March, at the SCLC's annual board meeting, his own

organization endorsed his position, pledging "to do everything in our power to end that war."[63] Already co-chairman of Clergy and Laymen Concerned About Vietnam, King joined with Joseph Rauh of the ADA in founding a group called "Negotiation Now," and sponsored "Vietnam Summer," a project organized by the CICAV. Vietnam Summer was modeled along the lines of a voter registration campaign, using thousands of young volunteers to stimulate and articulate opposition to the war in local communities throughout the nation.[64]

Two aspects of the peace movement were of particular concern to King: the campaign to remove Lyndon Johnson from the Presidency and the defense of the right of dissent. Although he tried to avoid ad hominem arguments, King considered Johnson himself to be the major obstacle to peace, and, while declining to run against the President himself on a third-party ticket, he promised that he would "very definitely" oppose Johnson's renomination in 1968, and urged peace activists to stage demonstrations at the Democratic convention in Chicago.[65] King was equally concerned with safeguarding the right of dissent. Encouraging opponents of the war of military age to register as conscientious objectors, he promised that "As long as I'm a pastor, this pastorate will be a sanctuary for young men who find the war obnoxious."[66] It was imperative, he said, that such government actions as the indictment of Dr Benjamin Spock and four others on conspiracy charges be opposed, "lest the Federal Government think

that men of conscience can be cowed into silence." At a rally to protest the indictments in February 1968, he vowed that "we as ministers and priests and rabbis . . . will forever stand with our young men in their moments of conscience; we were ordained to do this." The peace movement, he continued, would have to adopt the militancy of the civil rights movement and say, " 'we ain't gonna let jail-houses turn us around.'" [67]

The Storm of Criticism

King's commitment to the peace movement was angrily denounced by many of his erstwhile allies. "Beyond Vietnam," the Washington Post charged, was made up of "sheer inventions of unsupported fantasy" and, as a consequence, King had "diminished his usefulness to his cause, to his country, and to his people."[68] It was a typical reaction. King's critics rarely confronted the morality of the war: they preferred to accuse him of tactical stupidity, aiding the enemy, or political opportunism.

A common theme of King's critics in the civil rights movement was that he was attempting to "merge" the civil rights and peace movements. This effort, according to the NAACP's board of directors, was "a serious tactical mistake. . . . Civil rights battles will have to be fought on their own merits, irrespective of the state of war or peace in the world."[69] A variation on this theme was that King had a right to dissent from the war,

"but not," according to Thurgood Marshall, "as a civil rights leader." Others, like Whitney Young and Bayard Rustin, clung to the illusion of "guns and butter," and were loathe to alienate the President's support.[70]

More hostile critics tended to resort to the classic technique of guilt by association. Indeed, King had left himself open to "Red-baiting" attacks by his participation in the non-exclusionary Spring Mobilization. Typical of this technique was Carl Rowan's article, "Martin Luther King's Tragic Decision." Dwelling at length on alleged Communist infiltration of the SCLC and the peace movement, the article was, as David Lewis put it, "a masterly piece of political assassination."[71] In similar spirit, a Freedom House paper endorsed by the NAACP accused King of lending a "mantle of respectability" to "well-known Communist allies and luminaries of the hate-America left."[72]

It was not often that King was accused of opportunism, yet his peace activities engendered such accusations. His decision to join the peace movement, claimed the Washington Post, was prompted by his "disappointment at the slow progress of civil rights and the War on Poverty." Newsweek speculated that his move was a shrewd tactical decision, because "white liberals are increasingly deserting civil-rights causes for peace parades."[73] David Halberstam posited a different reason: "King is a moralist, a fairly pragmatic one, and he does not intend

to lose his position with young, militant, educated Negroes."[74]

Such tactical considerations were certainly a factor in his decision to campaign against the war. King was skeptical of the argument that his activities might damage the civil rights cause because "we are merely marking time . . . if we do not take a stand against the war." It was a view corroborated by a survey of civil rights leaders conducted by the Atlanta Constitution which concluded that "King's peace emphasis won't affect the civil rights movement because the movement as it has been known in the 1960's simply does not exist."[75]

Those who knew King realized that he felt obligated to oppose the war as a matter of conscience and principle. "It may not be a smart move . . . but it is a moral point of view he has to take," explained Paul Anthony of the Southern Regional Council.[76] Charges of opportunism ignored the fact that, as described above, King's stand alienated more support than it won. Their outspoken attacks on the war had contributed to the bankruptcy of SNCC and CORE.[77] When King's financial adviser predicted a similar fate for the SCLC, King replied, "I don't care if we don't get five cents in the mail. I'm going to keep on preaching my message."[78] As he often said, he did not determine what was right and wrong by looking at the budget of the SCLC, nor by taking a Gallup poll of the majority opinion. "There

comes a time," he used to conclude his anti-war speeches, "when one must take a position that is neither safe, nor politic, nor popular. But he must take it because conscience tells him it is right."[79]

Defending the New Course

King was shaken by the virulent criticism by his condemnation of the war. "It was a great burden to be attacked by people he respected," Andrew Young remembered, "particularly when the attacks engendered by the FBI came from people like Ralph McGill. He sat down and cried at the New York Times editorial about his statement on Vietnam, but this just made him more determined."[80] Refusing to be intimidated, King and his colleagues vigorously defended their stand, employing language that revealed, on occasion, bitter contempt for those black leaders who were sacrificing morality to political expediency. King denied that he was advocating a "fusion" of the civil rights and peace movements, and challenged the NAACP to take a forthright stand on the morality of the war, "rather than going off creating a non-existent issue." It was "misleading and shallow" to deny that the war was responsible for the narrowing of domestic programmes. The issues of peace and civil rights, he insisted, "are tied together, and I'm going to keep them together."[81]

The SCLC's most contemptuous rebukes were directed against those critics who identified the aims of the peace movement with those of the Communists. Carl Rowan was

"the worst kind of sophisticated Uncle Tom," charged Andrew Young, "catering to the worst . . . red-baiting, snide-innuendo approach to problems."[82] Such "McCarthy-like tactics," warned King, endangered hard-won civil liberties and increased the danger of repression.[83]

To emphasize the reasonableness of King's stand, the SCLC pointed out that respected journalists had defended it. "As a Nobel Peace Prize winner, he couldn't stay out of the peace movement," wrote Max Lerner. James A. Wechsler gave voice to the suspicions of many when charged the Johnson Administration with mounting a "concerted drive ... to isolate King as a 'far-out' figure and depict him as the captive of the fringe unilateral-withdrawal faction."[84] The absurdity of identifying King with the totalitarian left was demonstrated by the fact that the peace coalition included the American Jewish Congress, the National Council of Churches and Americans for Democratic Action. King spoke at the Nation Institute in the company of four US Senators; when he delivered "Beyond Vietnam" the audience included Dr Reinhold Niebuhr, the Rev. Eugene Carson Blake, Professor Hans. J. Morgenthau, and a host of eminent clergymen, theologians and academics.[85] The unthinking reaction to King's Vietnam statements merely illuminated the truth of his assertion that "in America we are in the tragic position of having a paranoid fear of Communism which can be as destructive as anything."[86]

Despite King's arguments, the conservative civil

rights organizations failed to oppose the war in his lifetime. Bayard Rustin, a Quaker, pacifist and conscientious objector during World War Two, offered a lukewarm defense of King's "right to debate" Vietnam, but advised blacks to shun the peace movement on the grounds that their "immediate problems . . . in America are so vast as to allow them little time or energy to focus upon international crises."[87] Unlike Rustin, who privately opposed the war, Whitney Young actively and vocally supported it. An admirer of Lyndon Johnson, Young found himself being used by the President to increase black support for the war. He was sent to South Vietnam to observe the "fairness" of the elections there. He publicly castigated King and claimed that "the greatest freedom that exists for Negroes in this country is the freedom to die in Vietnam."[88] That Young was willing to pay this price to preserve the President's friendship appalled King. In a bitter exchange with Young King was heard to say, "Whitney, what you're saying may get you a foundation grant, but it won't get you into the kingdom of truth."[89]

The arguments of Young and Rustin notwithstanding, the events of 1967 furnished inescapable proof of the connection between domestic reaction and the war in Vietnam. In the aftermath of the Newark and Detroit riots, Congress absorbed itself in a futile search for scapegoats. The House Un-American Activities Committee, the Senate Investigations Sub-committee and the Senate Judiciary Committee--

all traditional bastions of Southern reactionism--enjoyed a new lease of life, looking for conspiracies and "outside agitators" (many of whom, it was widely believed, were living off money from the Office of Economic Opportunity).[90] A motion that the Senate Investigations Subcommittee inquire into the social and economic causes of the riots was soundly defeated.[91]

Two weeks earlier, the House of Representatives had voted down a $40 million rat-control bill while passing by an overwhelming margin an anti-riot bill that breached the First Amendment and encouraged the persecution of such groups as SNCC and the Black Panthers. As in 1966, the War on Poverty was forced to brave a gauntlet of Congressional criticisms and cut-backs. The President, for his part, contented himself with observing that Congress had "carefully evaluated the situation as it sees fit." As Daniel Patrick Moynihan concluded: he "seems determined to do nothing."[92]

The United States was now spending $75 billion a year on defense, compared with $7 billion on welfare. The agricultural price-support programme received as much money as the Office of Economic Opportunity. More funds were appropriated for highway construction than for the War on Poverty, public housing, rent supplements, and urban renewal combined. The primary obstacle to social progress, observed Newsweek, "is obviously Vietnam." After the summer of 1967 there was less talk of "guns and butter" for,

as Whitney Young commented, "we aren't even getting oleo."[93]

III. KING'S CRITIQUE OF THE WAR IN VIETNAM

The Domestic Impact of the War

The starting-point of King's critique of the war in Vietnam was the contention that it had made "the Great Society a myth." Spending $500,000 for each dead Viet-Cong soldier, the government furnished a niggardly $53 for each person defined as poor in the "so-called war against poverty--which is not even a good skirmish."[94] The urgent problems of poverty and urban decay would never be tackled as long as the war continued, for "the majority of the present Congress and the Administration . . . is single-mindedly devoted to the pursuit of the war."[95] It was all very well to talk about "guns and butter," but war had its own iron logic. War always became the first national priority, and war always demanded reserves. Domestic reform tended to diminish those reserves, hence the "inescapable contradiction between war and social progress at home."[96]

The war had a particularly adverse effect upon blacks because they were already living in the grips of an economic depression, and inflation--the inevitable by-product of war--hit them "with crushing severity."[97] In addition, blacks were fighting and dying in Vietnam "in extraordinarily high proportions" to the population as a whole. (Even Bayard Rustin and Whitney Young agreed that

the draft discriminated against blacks.)[98] And what made this situation even more immoral was the fact that black people were being sent "to guarantee liberties in Southeast Asia which they had not found in southwest Georgia or Harlem." Such cruel manipulation of the poor could not go unchallenged. As the American build-up in Vietnam continued, King recounted in "Beyond Vietnam," "I watched the poverty program broken and eviscerated as if it were some idle political plaything of a society gone mad on war, and I knew that America would never invest the necessary funds or energies in rehabilitation of its poor so long as adventures like Vietnam continued."[99]

The war in Vietnam was also undermining the commitment of blacks to nonviolence, as evidenced by the increasing frequency and intensity of urban rioting. In contrast however, to the savage and atrocious violence inflicted by the United States on Vietnam, the "so-called Negro violence" was miniscule. How could the Administration piously condemn the destruction of property when it was itself destroying thousands of human lives in Vietnam, "the greatest purveyor of violence in the world today"? Only those who were working for peace, said King, "have the moral authority to lecture Negroes on non-violence."[100]

The effect of the war upon the youth of the nation was similarly damaging. It had produced a deep spiritual alienation that was manifested in drugtaking, revolutionary radicalism, utopian pacifism, and the escapism of the

hippies.[101] Even the majority of young people--outwardly conventional, struggling to adapt to the prevailing norms of society, and unready to take a clear-cut stand against the war--were nonetheless profoundly troubled by their nation's behaviour in Vietnam. They were being sent to fight in a war which they did not understand--a psychologically devastating experience. They were a generation that had never known peace; they were the children of the Cold War, the first "to grow up in the era of the nuclear bomb, knowing that it may be the last generation of mankind."[102]

The most disturbing domestic consequence of the war was its poisonous effect upon the nation's political life. It had strengthened the forces of reaction, racism and right-wing extremism; the "anti-labor, anti-Negro, and anti-humanistic forces." These elements had always been present in American life, but in 1964, with the crushing defeat of their standard-bearer Barry Goldwater, they had been politically isolated. The war, however, had strengthened the military-industrial complex and revived the right-wing. With the issue of "spurious patriotism" to garner popular support, they were now sufficiently powerful to reach out for the ultimate political prize: the White House. The war, King believed, had intensified the white backlash; racism and militarism went hand-in-hand. Commenting on political trends in November 1967, he acidly noted that "When a Hollywood performer--

lacking distinction even as an actor--can become a leading war-hawk candidate for the Presidency, only the irrationalities induced by a war psychosis can explain such a melancholy turn of events."[103] The threat from the right-wing was clearly visible in the government's indictment of nonviolent war protesters in an obvious attempt to stifle dissent. Although a recrudescence of McCarthyism had thus far been avoided, if the trend toward repression continued, "we shall be in danger of a right-wing takeover of the fascist type." Only the spirited resistance of the peace movement was preventing this calamity.[104]

"An Unjust, Cruel, Senseless War."

King did not oppose the Vietnam war merely because it had unfortunate domestic repercussions: the war itself, he believed, was "cruel and unjust." He was appalled by the sheer volume of death and destruction that was being inflicted by the world's richest and strongest nation on one of the smallest and poorest.[105] War was always terrible, but the techniques employed by the United States in Vietnam were particularly evil. What the Pentagon's computerized jargon tried to disguise, King attempted to describe:

> We herd them off the land of their fathers into concentration camps where minimal social needs are rarely met. They know that they must move or be destroyed by our bombs, and they go, primarily women and children. They watch as we poison their water, as we kill a million acres of their crops, and they wander into the hospitals with at least twenty casualties from American fire power to one Vietcong-inflicted injury. They wander into the towns and see thousands of children homeless, without clothes, running in packs on the streets like animals. 106

The United States had not only destroyed the social fabric of Vietnamese life: its weapons, napalm, bulldozers, and defoliants, were destroying the countryside itself. South Vietnam had become a nation of concrete military bases and concentration camps.[107]

The Vietnamese "must see the Americans as strange liberators." In the light of the war's historical background, the United States was the aggressor. The Vietnamese had proclaimed their own independence in 1945, only to be ignored by the United States, which preferred to back the French "in their abortive effort to recolonize" the country.[108] Then, violating the 1954 Geneva Accords, the United States conspired to prevent the elections that would have resulted in a united Vietnam ruled by Ho Chi Minh.[109] For nearly a decade, America supported Diem, "one of the most vicious modern dictators," whose murderous role created the very insurgency the United States was now fighting. Even after Diem's fall, the line of "corrupt, inept" military dictatorships did not end. Under the Ky-Thieu regime, elections were rigged and opponents silenced. The promises of democracy and land reform had acquired a hollow ring: "we are on the side of the wealthy and the secure while we create a hell for the poor."[110]

King had little doubt that it was Ho Chi Minh who represented the real aspirations of the peasants of Vietnam. He had led, and was still leading, an authentic, indigenous war of national liberation; "The men who led

the nation to independence against the Japanese and the French" were in Hanoi, not Saigon. It was not a war fought between Vietnamese: it was a war between the peasants and their landlords. The corrupt dictatorship supported by the United States had no roots among the peasantry. The latter, King asserted, "consider us--not their fellow Vietnamese--the real enemy."[111] He pointed out that the pro-war faction of South Vietnam received less than a third of the vote in the 1967 elections, that most of the countryside was controlled by the Vietcong, and that the army of South Vietnam displayed such a lack of enthusiasm for the conflict that it "may shortly become the first pacifist army on the war front."[112]

King had no wish to depict the Vietcong and the North Vietnamese as paragons of virtue, but he insisted that their case be put, and elected "to speak for those who have been designated as our enemies." The Administration talked of "Communist aggression," but refused to acknowledge the fact that the membership of the National Liberation Front was less than one quarter Communist. It talked of "invasion from the North," but forgot that the North did not send any troops to the South "until American forces had moved in by the tens of thousands." It deplored North Vietnam's refusal to negotiate, but neglected to tell the public about earlier North Vietnamese peace overtures, claiming "that none existed when they had clearly been made." It was obvious to the world, said King, "that we

have no honourable intentions in Vietnam."[113]

"We of the West Must Support These Revolutions"

Stokely Carmichael claimed that because he was a minister, King took a moral, not political, stand against the war.[114] Nevertheless, King did not confine his remarks to the immorality of the war in Vietnam. Warning against "going off on what . . . has become a popular crusade" against the war, he pointed out that the war was not an isolated mistake or a regrettable accident. Like Arnold Toynbee, King believed that a revolution was taking place throughout Asia, Africa and Latin America. It was not a conflict between freedom and dictatorship, or even capitalism and communism: it was a clash between the rich and the poor nations of the world:

> These are revolutionary times. All over the globe men are revolting against old systems of exploitation and oppression, and out of the womb of a frail world new systems of justice and equality are being born. The shirtless and barefoot people of the earth are rising up as never before. "The people who sat in darkness have seen a great light." 115

This movement was accompanied by violent conflicts; it did not leave stable, peaceful democracies in its wake. Nevertheless, King urged, "We in the West must support these revolutions." It was an irony of history that the United States and the nations of Western Europe, ostensibly the cradle of liberty and democracy, had become "the arch anti-revolutionaries" of the twentieth century. Vietnam was part of a "pattern of suppression" which covered much of Southeast Asia, Africa and Latin America. It was a pattern

of economic exploitation which allowed American or multi-national corporations to reap immense profits while showing "no concern for the social benefit of the countries;" which permitted huge cartels to strip underdeveloped nations of their resouces "while turning over a small rebate to a few members of a corrupt aristocracy."[118] It was a pattern of military domination which involved the United States in coups d'état and counterrevolutionary warfare in order to "maintain social stability for our investments." It was a pattern of political repression in which America allied with the landed gentry of South east Asia and Latin America, the colonial regimes of Angola and Mozambique, and the white minority governments of South Africa and Rhodesia.[117]

Vietnam, King concluded, was "but a symptom of a far deeper malady within the American spirit." It was the inevitable consequence of a social system which proclaimed equality but practiced racism, which abounded in material prosperity but ignored its poor people. These evils, when set against America's dazzling accomplishments in the realms of science, technology and production, revealed a "poverty of the spirit." A nation that spent eighty billion dollars a year on defense and war "and a mere pittance here and there for social uplift," was a nation approaching "spiritual doom."[118] Americans would have to shed their "irrational obsessive anti-communism" and honestly confront the reality of Vietnam and all that it represented.[119] The

turmoil of the Third World, like the unrest of blacks and poor people in the United States, was the product of racism and capitalist exploitation. And as long as "profit motives are more important than people," no amount of coercion would ensure tranquility. A thoroughgoing reform of Western capitalism was required, accompanied by a generous programme of economic aid and reparations to Vietnam and other underdeveloped countries. War and oppression must give way to a revolution in spiritual values that would transcend "tribe, race, class, and nation."[120]

CHAPTER IX

BLACK POWER AND "POOR PEOPLE'S POWER"

By early 1967, it was clear that the SCLC's campaign in Chicago had failed. After Daley's reelection the CCCO disintegrated, and Al Raby resigned in despair. "I will no longer be a sponge for black frustration," he bitterly remarked. "And when the next riots hit, the whites had better not look to me to cool things. That was what the Chicago Freedom Movement was trying to do, but the Mayor wasn't listening."[1] King's threat to renew the demonstrations was an empty one. Daley had received more than 80 per cent of the black vote, and was no longer vulnerable to pressure from the civil rights movement. King publicly claimed that Chicago had been "a wonderful proving ground for our work in the North" but, privately, he knew that the campaign had failed.[2]

In the South, meanwhile, the civil rights movement had collapsed in all but a handful of counties, and continuing white resistance threatened the gains that had been won. When asked if the SCLC had temporarily written off the South, Hosea Williams admitted that "I guess that is what it amounts to."[3] The task now confronting the SCLC was to create an effective civil rights movement in the North, while simultaneously consolidating its Southern victories. The circumstances could hardly be more inauspicious: SNCC and CORE were virtually defunct; Black

Power was dividing blacks and alienating whites; the Northern ghettos were exploding; the federal government was hostile to black demands in general and King in particular; and, finally, the war in Vietnam presented an apparently insuperable barrier to further social reform.

I. THE SCLC AND BLACK POWER

King's Critique of Black Power

At the conclusion of the first day of the Meredith March, in June 1966, a heated debate took place between the leaders of SNCC, CORE and the SCLC. Stokely Carmichael, chairman of SNCC, and Floyd McKissick, secretary of CORE, proposed that whites be excluded from the march. King was appalled by the suggestion. "I reminded them," he later wrote, "of the dedicated whites who had suffered, bled and died in the cause of racial justice." He also doubted the wisdom of Carmichael's desire to make self-defense a principal feature of the march. To carry guns on a nonviolent civil rights demonstration, King argued, would give the white authorities a perfect excuse to attack. After many hours of discussion, only King's threat to withdraw from the march preserved the principles of white participation and nonviolence.[4]

The Black Power slogan, first used on the march in Greenwood, revived these divisive issues. But although the mood it articulated was repugnant to him, King chose to interpret rather than denounce the slogan. He asked whites

to understand that Black Power was a reaction "to the abuses of white power," a "cry of disappointment" with the "inconsistencies, resistance and faintheartedness" of the nation's white leaders.[5] It was the slogan itself that King opposed, not the concept behind it. "I prefer not to use it," he explained, "not because I don't understand its denotative reasons, but because it has conotative implications."[6] While agreeing with the need for "the amassing of political and economic strength to achieve our justifiable goals," the Black Power slogan carried overtones of violence and separatism.[7]

King considered the advocates of violence and/or separatism guilty of the most glaring illogic. Historically, revolutions had only succeeded when governments lost the allegiance of their armed forces. There was no sign of this in the United States, where the government could call upon "the local police, the state troopers, the national guard and finally the army . . . all of which are predominantly white."[8] Theories that the salvation of American blacks lay with Africa or the Third World were dismissed by King as "beyond the realm of serious discussion." Rather than Africa liberating blacks in America, the advancement of Africa depended upon the elimination of "racist imperialism from within" the United States, thereby releasing the vast sums spent on militarism for "liberating the world from want."[9]

King strenuously denied that Black Power had caused

the "white backlash"--the latter was merely a new name for white racism. He believed, nonetheless, that Black Power exacerbated white reaction. Threats of violence, "verbalized by those who equate it with militancy," had a similar effect to actual violence: both intensified "the fears of the white majority while relieving their guilt." Black Power dissipated the "moral climate" that had made progress possible.[10]

King condemned separatism as equally harmful and unrealistic. In 1965 he had warned that "Negroes acting alone and in a hostile posture towards all whites will do nothing more than demonstrate that their conditions of life are unbearable, and that they are unbearably angry."[11] Blacks could achieve very little in isolation. In politics, black candidates would need white support to secure election: only eighty-seven Southern counties, and a single Congressional seat contained a black majority in 1965.[12] Then again, even when blacks were elected to local offices, the governmental structures they acquired were totally inadequate to cope with the problems of poverty, unemployment and slum housing; only the federal government commanded the resources to make the necessary structural changes in the overall economy. In short, King concluded, "the Negroes' problem cannot be solved unless the whole of American society takes a new turn toward greater economic justice." This would require the political weight of "an alliance of liberal-labor-civil-rights forces" to overcome

the ingrained resistance to such a turn. In a society in which all races were politically and economically interdependent, "no group can make it alone."[13]

The Need for Black Unity

At the 1966 annual convention of the NAACP, Roy Wilkins denounced Black Power as "the father of hatred and the mother of violence." Guest speaker Vice President Hubert Humphrey echoed these words and, to make the position of the federal government ummistakeably clear, President Johnson voiced his opposition to Black Power on national television.[14]

King refused to join this chorus of denunciation. On the questions of Vietnam, the need for direct action, and the necessity for a radical restructuring of American society the SCLC fell out with the Johnson administration, the NAACP and the Urban League. While opposing the philosophy of Black Power, King made it clear that he would not cease to work for tactical unity among black organizations. His belief in unity went deep. "The best way to defeat an army is to divide it," he had written in 1964.[15] "Dr King never attacked any black man," admitted Stokely Carmichael in 1970, "because he always sought to unify rather than to divide us."[16]

In his relations with the NAACP, King had always endeavoured to maintain an appearance of unity. It was out of deference to the Association that the SCLC never

adopted a membership programme. And even when prominent NAACP board members were publicly criticizing him, King refused to reply in kind. King was even more anxious to retain the friendship of SNCC. The two organizations had stood shoulder-to-shoulder in Albany, Birmingham, Danville, and Selma. "From the beginning, Martin Luther King had respect and love for SNCC," recalled one SNCC veteran.[17] He had shielded SNCC from attack, defended its militancy, and adopted an attitude of fatherly (if sometimes patronizing) affection. By 1965, when the NAACP refused to work with SNCC, and when many SNCC staffers were ridiculing him as "De Lawd" and portraying him as a sophisticated Uncle Tom, King continued to seek SNCC's cooperation.[18] And when SNCC became the target of Red-baiting attacks, King repudiated charges of Communism, and supported its right to oppose the war in Vietnam.19

Even as SNCC openly spurned his leadership during the Meredith March, King strove to avoid an irreparable break. Against the advice of his lieutenants, he refused to quit the march; when "Black Power" was being defiantly hurled in his face, he tried to seek common ground with SNCC. "Dr King has never said a man didn't have the duty to defend his person or home against attack," Andrew Young explained. On Vietnam and on the need for black power, "SNCC's position . . . isn't too far from ours except in style and semantics."[20] King and Young had lived and worked in the Deep South for most of their lives;

they could understand the mood to which Black Power gave expression. Wrote King:

> If Stokely Carmichael now says that non-violence is irrelevant, it is because he . . . has seen with his own eyes the most brutal white violence against Negroes and civil rights workers, and he has seen it go unpunished. 21

There was an additional reason why King refused to categorically condemn the groups that had adopted Black Power. According to Coretta, he divided the advocates of Black Power into two groups: "A few were convinced terrorists, and these he sought to isolate. The larger number were honestly confused on tactics and, with them, he had many long discussions."[22] To repudiate the latter would be to play into the hands of the enemies of the civil rights movement, who were exploiting Black Power "to justify resistance to change."[23] A posture of moral superiority towards the nationalists merely distracted attention from the greater culpability of white Americans for tolerating the conditions which nurtured a philosophy such as Black Power. As the SCLC insisted in a full-page advertisement in the New York Times, "It is not enough to condemn Black Power." "Some established Negro leaders," wrote King, "are bitterly denouncing the black power advocates and urge that they be treated as untouchables." This approach was the height of foolishness, since it would merely strengthen the belief already held by many lower-class blacks that their middle-class leaders were "Joining the ranks of the white oppressor." Moreover,

the mood behind Black Power could not be wished away. The yawning gulf between legislation and enforcement, between promise and reality, had shattered black hope, leading to a justifiable loss of faith in the white majority. Bitterness and violence were deplorable, but they were the products of white racism. "Pious lectures" to the nationalists ignored the fact that "it is not the Negro who is on trial, but white society."[24]

King's struggle to repair black unity led him into some ambiguous positions. When Roy Wilkins, Whitney Young, Bayard Rustin, and A. Philip Randolph issued a statement condemning "strategies of violence," King offered a verbal endorsement, but refused to sign it.[25] He feared that the tone of the statement might be interpreted as an "excommunication" of SNCC and CORE; if so, he felt, it only aided "the enemies of civil rights."[26] King was offended by the enthusiasm with which the NAACP had seized upon the Black Power slogan to denounce SNCC and CORE. "I get the impression," he told the New York Times, "that the NAACP wouldn't mind a split, because they think they are the only civil rights organization."[27]

The Drift Away From Integration

In common with many of its critics, Harold Cruse pointed out that although Black Power sounded threatening and revolutionary, it was really a "methodological retreat to black social reforms." Bloc voting, the development of black political power and economic self-help had always

been goals of the nonviolent civil rights movement. Now, when the massive government programmes envisaged by King, Whitney Young and others failed to materialize, blacks were forced to "fall back on what few political and economic reform gains they had won."[28]

King saw much in Black Power that was acceptable. The development of black economic strength was firmly in the tradition of the SCLC's own Operation Breadbasket, a programme launched in 1962 to secure "more and better jobs for the Negro people."[29] Breadbasket had been one of the successful facets of the Chicago campaign. Under the direction of the Rev. Jesse L. Jackson, it won a thousand new or upgraded jobs between April and December 1966. Breadbasket also aimed to fortify black businesses and financial institutions.[30] Economic self-help--Operation Breadbasket, black capitalism and the organization of tenant unions--was the backbone of the SCLC's activities in Cleveland during the summer of 1967.[31] The launching of Breadbasket as a national programme, in July 1967. reflected the enthusiasm with which King viewed black economic development.[32]

The SCLC's new emphasis on black solidarity was, in part, a frank recognition of the fact that integration was still a long way off, and that the civil rights movement should meanwhile work for more immediately attainable goals. The ultimate objective of the Chicago campaign had been open housing; its immediate goal was the

development of black power by means of tenant unions and neighbourhood organizations. The Conference was, in fact, labouring to strengthen the ghetto. "We're not just out to end exploitation," said one SCLC worker, "we're trying to build community."[33] The younger members of King's staff realized that integration was not a very useful or relevant concept in the context of the Northern ghetto. And, after nine months in Chicago, King himself came to a similar conclusion. "Let's face the fact," he told a black audience in August 1966,

> Most of us are going to be living in the ghetto five, ten years from now. But we've got to get some things straightened out right away. I'm not going to wait a month to get the rats and roaches out of my house. Morally, we ought to have what we say in the slogan, Freedom Now. But it doesn't all come now. That's a sad fact of life you have to live with. [34]

The Louisville Campaign

The SCLC's campaign for open housing in Louisville, Kentucky, underlined the lesson of Chicago: demonstrations, in the absence of strong white support, were ineffective. Once again, the intensity of white opposition to integrated neighbourhoods rendered obsolete the traditional direct action techniques of the civil rights movement.

When the Louisville board of aldermen considered a fair housing ordinance in January 1967, the Kentucky Christian Leadership Conference (led by the Rev. A.D. King, Martin's brother) used the threat of demonstrations as a

bargaining tactic. Five SCLC workers arrived in early March, in order to prepare the black community for demonstrations in the event of the city failing to enact a strong law.[35] The SCLC's intervention widened a split in the city's black leadership, prompting the "moderates" to publicly denounce the Conference personnel as "itinerant rabble-rousers who disrupt a community, accomplish nothing, and move on to leave the residents to suffer from their irresponsible acts."[36] Unperturbed, the Rev. Al Sampson organized small demonstrations, sit-ins and picketing at City Hall as the crucial vote approached.[37] The pressure was intensified by Martin Luther King's promise to lead massive demonstrations unless a "meaningful law" were passed.[38]

The city's refusal to pass any law at all was a slap in the face of the black community and, on April II, A.D. King and Dick Gregory led Louisville's first open housing march. As in Chicago, the marches attracted crowds of jeering whites.[39] The violent white reaction to the KCLC-led marches had the effect of uniting Louisville's black leaders. Although the "responsibles" had not supported the demonstrations, they backed a suit to dissolve the city's injunction against the marches, and the NAACP launched a boycott of the city's white stores.[40] Frank L. Stanley, owner of the Louisville Defender and himself one of the "Moderates," editorialized that "the so-called 'responsible Negro leadership' which the aldermen praised

but never heeded has now closed ranks in the local civil rights struggle."[41] Meanwhile, on April 16, thirty SCLC workers converged on Louisville from Chicago, Alabama and Mississippi, led by Hosea Williams.[42]

During the following seven weeks, Louisville became another Chicago, except that now the KCLC marched in defiance of an injunction and, while the police dispersed white mobs, they simultaneously arrested large numbers of demonstrators (700 between April 18-24).[43] The mass arrests weakened the campaign. Negotiations were broken off when the city decided to jail A.D. King and six other leaders. On May 3, after a fruitless meeting with the Mayor, Martin Luther King urged the resumption of demonstrations on an even larger scale.[44] As always, King's presence revived a flagging movement. "When Dr King . . . addressed a rally at the Mount Zion Baptist Church," observed one reporter, "it was a wonder that the very stones of the edifice didn't come out of the walls to join the march."[45] Again, however, after King departed the marchers dwindled in number; by June the demonstrations had faded away. Three months later, the KCLC announced more demonstrations, but there was little enthusiasm in the black community.[46] Reviewing the movement, the Louisville Defender concluded that "any assessment of the value of the demonstrations of the past months . . . shows that they had virtually no effect. . . . It appears that Louisville is in the identical situation as Milwaukee--saddled with a

negative City Council on open housing."[47]

The Louisville movement eventually achieved its goal. After a voter registration campaign, a new board of aldermen was elected. All of the Democrats, who included two blacks, were pledged to open housing.[48] The measure which they approved on December 13 banned discrimination by bankers, real estate agents and private owners in the inspection, negotiation, sale, lease, and rent of property. It was the first open housing law in the South.[49] But it was a triumph not of nonviolent direct action, but of the vote. Observed the city's black newspaper: "The Louisville Negro has flexed his political muscles and found them strong."[50]

The Louisville struggle had a profound effect upon Martin Luther King. On March 30, he had appealed for volunteers to march and turn "dark yesterdays into bright tomorrows." When he returned five months later, his language was less idealistic, more militant. The language of love and morality had been complemented by a rhetoric of power. Moral appeals were useless when "the vast majority of Americans are racists, whether consciously or unconsciously." King was now urging an intensive voter registration campaign, so that the intransigent aldermen could be ousted. "Power is the right use of strength," he argued. "The political process is the creative use of power." As William Drummond observed at the time, King appeared to have abandoned the traditional tactics of the

movement in favour of "a version of what is called Black Power." He had not given up the goal of integration, but the reality of white racism and black political isolation dictated a different kind of strategy for the immediate future:

> We still want open housing, and we are still going to work for it, but it seems that our white brothers and sisters don't want to live next to us. They are hemming us in. Since they intend to keep us here, we will have to deal with it. What we are going to have to do is to take over political power in the central cities. And then we'll start taxing everybody who works in the city and lives in the suburbs. I know that sounds mean, but I just want to be realistic. 51

II. THE SCLC AND THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT: FROM ALLIANCE TO OPPOSITION

Black Power and Political Dependence

The advocates of Black Power were determined that black leaders should proclaim their independence from whites. The leaders of the civil rights movement, charged Stokely Carmichael, based their strategy on the assumption that whites would grant equality to blacks once they perceived the moral rightness of that demand.[52] Consequently, their language was "adapted to an audience of liberal whites," instead of to the black community. The civil rights movement, argued Nathan Wright, had perpetuated a "slave mentality" by "looking to others for direction and support" or, as Carmichael put it, by bargaining from a position of weakness and relying upon a chimerical commitment to equality on the part of the white majority.[53]

Carmichael, Wright and others attacked the leadership of the civil rights movement not only because it had failed to deliver on its promises, but also because its strategy and bargaining posture left it open to co-optation. If black leaders depended on white support and white power (so went the theory), they were swiftly reduced to a position of impotent dependency. "The ever-recurring cry" of the established black leadership, wrote Lerone Bennett, was "'Deal with us or the radicals will take over,'" a statement that "tells much about the relationship between the masses and the men who claim to be their leaders."[54] The function of established black leadership was to curb the militancy of the masses in exchange for token concessions and rewards.

The rationale of Black Power, with its belief in independent black action, had long been evident in SNCC. Always distrustful of the coalitionist strategy advocated by King and the NAACP, the 1964 Atlantic City debacle convinced SNCC that coalitionism led to co-optation and tokenism, and that the Democratic party could not serve black needs. Blacks who owed their position to that party, wrote Carmichael, "become no more than puppets," like Congressman William Dawson of Chicago, "a tool of the white Democratic power structure."[55] Civil rights leaders were equally susceptible to co-optation. By 1965, many in SNCC and CORE had come to believe that King's power and influence stemmed not from a popular base in the black community, but

from "Democratic Presidents and their emissaries," as August Meier put it. Inevitably, Meier argued, King's willingness to accede to the "entreaties of the political establishment" limited his radicalism, leading to excessive caution, moderation, and a tendency to accept "compromises considered by some half a loaf or less."[56] As one SNCC worker put it: "He's got one foot in the cotton field and one in the White House."[57]

The line between co-optation and cooperation was always difficult to distinguish. As Pat Watters noted, "the movement knew what the liberals in Washington wanted," and adapted its tactics accordingly. SCLC campaigns thus took on the character of scenarios, "a staging under rigid control of what seem to be spontaneous events."[58] Nevertheless, what was good for the civil rights movement and what was politically beneficial to the Democratic party could, at times, coincide. Co-optation and manipulation were unavoidable dangers because it was King's firm belief that only through the Democractic party in power could civil rights be enforced and economic deprivation overcome. In 1958 he had called for "strong and aggressive leadership from the federal government." During the next seven years he continued to urge that government power "move resolutely to the side of the freedom movement."[59]

The suspicions held by black militants that King was "selling out" were exacerbated by his enthusiasm for Lyndon Johnson. "He knowingly ran the gauntlet of political

suicide in his very first speech," wrote King. "This was courageous and heroic."[60] The SCLC worked openly for Johnson's reelection and its confidence in the new President was fortified by his response to the Selma campaign. Johnson's speech to the Congress requesting a Voting Rights bill was, King believed, "one of the most eloquent, unequivocal pleas for human rights ever made by a President of the United States."[61]

The 1964 Presidential election, and the stunning defeat of Barry Goldwater, seemed to indicate a national consensus in favour of progressive social change. The election, wrote King, had all but killed the "white backlash" and eliminated it as a political issue. "A massive coalition of white and Negro forces" had been constructed through the agency of the civil rights movement; the freedom struggle could now move to "a new elevated level" whence it could proceed to make "equal economic opportunity" a reality.[62] "That coalition of conscience," claimed Congressman Andrew Young in 1975, "paved the way for . . . all sorts of people-orientated legislation that came out of the sixties. It gave birth to the great society" of which the Civil Rights Act, the Voting Rights Act and the Economic Opportunity Act were the most significant landmarks.[63]

The Civil Rights Retreat of the Johnson Administration

Even Bayard Rustin, one of the most enthusiastic

advocates of the coalitionist strategy, warned that there was a danger in the massive Johnson victory. If the President pursued a lacklustre "centrist" course, he would be unable to "hold together a coalition so inherently unstable and rife with contradictions," and his mandate would be "wastefully dissipated."[64] King, although pleased with Johnson's victory, was critical of the very concept of "consensus". Government by consensus would dictate "slow reform, which . . . would be inadequate reform. This could be the worst possible moment for slowing down."[65]

By 1966 the civil rights movement had become, through its association with riots, and its demands for open housing and economic aid, a political liability. The federal government had already relaxed the scope and intensity of its civil rights enforcement effort in the summer and autumn of 1965. The 1966 White House Conference "To Fulfill These Rights" made the policy of federal disengagement from the civil rights movement painfully clear, and illustrated the growing divisiveness of the war in Vietnam and the political disfavour into which King had fallen.

The whole conference had a stage-managed quality about it. "Action was discouraged," wrote Andrew Kopkind, "if not exactly paralyzed, by a tightly-structured program, CIA-worthy controls, and a huge 'consensus' guest list."[66] Civil rights leaders were outnumbered by a host of corporate executives, bankers, labour union leaders,

university presidents, and Democratic party faithfuls.[67] Free debate was stifled by rules that failed to provide for resolutions from the floor and formal voting. Thus Floyd McKissick's attack on the war in Vietnam was rudely and summarily dismissed by James Nabrit.[68]

As Robert Sherill noted, the "consensus" structure of the conference meant that "particular grievances were smothered in the broad agenda of social ills . . . with deadeningly broad remedies."[69] Andrew Kopkind discerned a Johnsonian strategy of divide-and-conquer at work, whereby Presidential favour flowed only to the "responsible" black leaders--responsibility being largely defined as support for the war in Vietnam.[70] SNCC was absent from the deliberations; King was not invited to speak.

The Conference had been planned to formulate a governmental assault upon the problems of urban poverty. By the time it convened, the war in Vietnam, ghetto rioting, white backlash, and the growth of black separatism in SNCC and CORE had clouded the political horizon. "The indispensible pre-condition for any Johnsonian undertaking--consensus--no longer existed," wrote Richard Rovere.[71] The civil rights movement was no longer popular; to support it made white politicians prime targets for a "white backlash" vote. Even the small and experimental War on Poverty had become widely unpopular among whites. "Mr Johnson is convinced that the public mood will not permit any 'big and bold' programs for

Negroes," wrote Gene Roberts in September. The White House Conference had been an exercise in meaningless debate. It was a "nice tea-party," said Andrew Young, "but it's not much more than that. The President got himself into a corner last year promising things he couldn't deliver. Vietnam got in the way."[72]

The Government and the Ghetto Riots

When discussing the ghetto riots, King often quoted Victor Hugo: "If the soul is left in darkness, sins will be committed. The guilty one is not he who commits the sin, but he who causes the darkness."[73] Long before urban riots became prevalent, King had emphasized that nonviolence was not an absolute. It could only retain its ideological primacy in the civil rights movement if whites took positive steps to remedy injustice. Nonviolent direct action offered whites an opportunity to free "the dangerously structured dams that block the flow of social progress." But if that opportunity were spurned, "Negroes will, out of frustration and despair," turn to violence and separatism.[74] Nonviolence was not a form of emotional catharsis: it demanded a constructive and sincere response.

After the riots of 1964, King repeated his warning that the only remedy for black violence was the abolition of poverty and unemployment. As long as "small handouts" remained the order of the day, "there will be an ever

present threat of violence and rioting."[75] He denied that such statements in any way incited violence. "It is not a threat but a fact of history," he told Playboy, that if "an oppressed people's emotions are not non-violently released, they will be violently released."[76] Rioting, he explained to a Senate subcommittee, was the "language of the unheard" and, although that language was irrational, immoral and futile, it was also a desperate cry for help that deserved attention and sympathy. Social justice and equality were the only "absolute guarantors of riot prevention."[77] Nonviolence could not co-exist with an inequality that showed unlimited life expectancy.

Tragic though they were, Watts, Newark and Detroit revealed less about the depravity of blacks than about the "deep and systemic" nature of the evils in American society.[78] The crimes that blacks committed during riots were not only relatively minor--largely the destruction of property--but also "derivative" in nature, crimes "born of the greater crimes of the white society."[79] The abuse of property rights could not compare with the daily, unpunished crimes committed by whites in the ghettos of America: "Let us state boldly," said King in his Massey lectures, "that if the total slum violations of law by the white man over the years were calculated and compared with the lawbreaking of a few days of riots, the hardened criminal would be the white man."[80]

The reaction of the President and the Congress to

the riots dismayed King. Congress's search for conspiracies, and reduction of anti-poverty funds were "as inflammatory as inciting a riot."[81] In a bitterly ironic turn of phrase, King accused Congress of engaging in "political guerrilla warfare against the defenseless poor of our nation."[82] It was all very well to blame the Black Power advocates for causing riots, or creating the atmosphere for riots, but it was time for somebody to say "that it is the Congress of the United States of America that's causing riots in our country."[83]

King was not really surprised that a Congress dominated by Southern reactionaries would respond to riots with repression. He had expected more, however, from the President. Johnson, wrote King in his last article, was "amazingly devoid of statesmanship."[84] His only actions in the wake of the Newark riot had consisted of setting up a riot commission and calling for a national day of prayer. "When a government commands more wealth and power than has ever been known in the history of the world," wrote King, "and offers no more than this, it is worse than blind, it is provocative."[85] If the government persisted in such trivial measures the riots, which were still unplanned and confused acts of emotional catharsis, might become genuine insurrections accompanied by guerrilla warfare.[86]

III. "POOR PEOPLE'S POWER"

The Disunity of the Peace Movement

By the spring of 1967, the SCLC's opposition to the war in Vietnam was so intense that the Conference found itself in a de facto alliance with such Black Power groups as SNCC and CORE.[87] But the emergence of a broadly-based anti-war movement did nothing to revive the fast-disintegrating civil rights movement. The anti-war movement was an unwieldy coalition of disparate groups which were united only by their common hatred of what the United States was doing in Vietnam. White radicals and black nationalists came together over the war issue, but on most other questions they were divided.

King's hope that the energy of the peace movement might be harnessed to the civil rights movement was shattered by the National Conference for a New Politics, held in September 1967. The meeting was supposed to construct a united anti-war strategy for the 1968 Presidential election. Andrew Young was a co-sponsor, and King was the keynote speaker.[88] However, as soon as the delegates assembled, it became clear that there was little semblance of unity among the 200 groups in attendance. The "Old Left" groups favoured a third-party, while the "New Left" groups advocated local organizing.[89] But the most serious division was a racial one: the insistence of the Black Caucus that they be given equal voting power,

and that the Conference approve a list of resolutions including a condemnation of "Zionism" in the Middle East. Eventually the Caucus's demands were conceded, but they had alienated many whites, diverted attention from the war issue and destroyed any hope of overall unity.[90]

Equally disturbing was the sense of unreality about the debates and speeches. Words like "revolution," and phrases such as "bringing down the system" were used with such frequency that language was debased and a fantasy world created.[91] The SCLC delegates were appalled by the gap between revolutionary rhetoric and political reality. "You don't have to do Mickey Mouse things to prove your identity," said James Bevel. "What is really needed is to get rid of the fascist mentality in this country."[92] Alienated, embittered and battle-weary, the veterans of the New Left had become trapped in a fantasy world of revolutionary nihilism. As Andrew Young commented: "These cats don't know the country has taken a swing to the right."[93]

"Power for the Powerless--SCLC's Basic Challenge"

In early 1967, King attempted to diagnose the crisis that confronted the civil rights movement. He had previously viewed white racism as an irrational prejudice rooted in the individual personality, and, collectively, an attitude of cultural superiority.[94] But the resistance encountered by the civil rights movement in the

North revealed a deeper layer of racism. The gains of the decade 1955-65 had been misleading: "Everyone . . . underestimated the amount of bigotry the white majority was disguising."[95] After the achievement of an abstract, legal equality, the movement had gone on to attack forms of racism which resided in the economic and political structures of society. But the truth was that most whites, North and South, reaped a "financial privilege" from the low wages, unemployment and segregation of blacks.[96] Economic equality meant that "privileged groups will have to give up some of their billions." This was the real source of the white backlash.[97]

King no longer believed that most whites were sincerely committed to racial equality. The liberal coalition which had supported the civil rights movement between 1963 and 1965 had fallen apart; it would not reassemble for the goal of economic equality.[98] Henceforth the movement would have to reply upon the "creative minority of true believers" in the white community (mostly students and church people), and concentrate on developing the latent power of the black community.[99] The problem confronting the civil rights movement was not a lack of programmes, but the absence of "undergirding power to bring about enough pressure so that these programs can become a reality."[100] The preoccupation with programmes indicated either a naïve belief in the inherent benevolence of government, or an attempt to shift

the blame for inaction onto blacks and black leaders.[101] Black demands were not ignored because the civil rights movement lacked programmes: they were ignored because blacks lacked power. "Our nettlesome task," wrote King, "is to discover how to organize our strength into compelling power so that government can no longer elude our demands."[102]

One of the weaknesses of the civil rights movement, King believed, had been its failure to organize the enthusiasm and energy that it aroused. The Southern movement had thrived on dramatic confrontations and headline-arresting crises, but it had not organized its supporters into permanent units.[103] The development of black political power would entail "the hard job of organizing tenants, organizing welfare recipients, organizing the unemployed and the underemployed."[104] Blacks would also have to emulate the Irish and Italians by becoming "intensive political activists."[105] An equally important task was the improvement of black economic conditions through the pooling of resources. Through the labour movement, the consumer boycott and the strengthening of black business, blacks would be able to augment their economic resources.[106] This kind of strategy, "organizing solidly and simultaneously in thousands of places," would take up to five years, he predicted.[107]

Organization, however, was not enough. Unlike Bayard Rustin, King did not scorn self-help, but he was

aware that "howevermuch we pool our resources . . . this cannot create the multiplicity of new jobs and provide the number of low-cost houses that will lift the Negro out of the economic depression caused by centuries of deprivation."[108] Likewise, black political power was a laudable aim, but blacks would need white allies on the national level. Black mayors were a legitimate source of black pride, but were "not the ultimate answer" because mayors were "relatively impotent figures in the scheme of national politics."[109]

To seriously reduce black poverty there would have to be a guaranteed annual income, an increased minimum wage, a large-scale public works programme, millions of new low-income housing units, and cheap, efficient rapid transit systems.[110] And only through political alliances could such programmes be enacted. Coalitionism was still possible because not only were "tens of millions of white Americans . . . sincere allies of the Negro," but also poverty and urban problems cut across racial boundaries. The political future was not in machine politics, but in "new alliances of Negroes, Puerto Ricans, labor, liberals, certain church and middle-class elements."[111]

Finally, King recognized the need for new tactics. The Chicago campaign had been flawed by an inability to exert sufficient pressure. Marches lacked the kind of dramatic impact that they had in the South. "In the North," wrote King, "street demonstrations were not even a

mild expression of militancy."[112] But this did not mean that nonviolent direct action should be abandoned; on the contrary, it should be escalated to a new level. In Where Do We Go From Here? King speculated on the possibility of 100,000 people disrupting the life of a major city--for days if necessary--and, at the SCLC's 1967 annual convention, he claimed that mass civil disobedience "that would be costly to the society but not wantonly destructive," was the answer to the tactical impasse of the civil rights movement.[113]

The Obstacles to King's Strategy

King's proposals met with hostility and skepticism. His strategy, wrote Martin Duberman, "suffers as he himself must realize from the lack of available allies for the coalition he advocates." Andrew Kopkind was more scathing: "Whites have ceased to believe him: the blacks hardly listen."[114] Politically, the outlook could hardly be bleaker. As King admitted, "there is no disposition by the Administration nor Congress to seek fundamental remedies beyond police measures."[115] There was little evidence that whites would support the kind of government spending that King's proposals called for. After an exhaustive survey of white opinion, William Brink and Louis Harris concluded that "the prospect of rallying that collective will any time soon seem quite remote. . . . there appears to be little disposition on the part of

American whites to give the Negro any kind of special consideration.[116]

The attitude of the Johnson administration was equally discouraging. As its preoccupation with the war in Vietnam intensified, its interest in racial problems declined. Moreover, whereas in the past the federal government had aided the civil rights movement, now, as King realized, "the very forces that have been restraining our opponents may be the ones against us."[117] Even the Supreme Court, the movement's staunchest ally, was bending to the pressure of white opinion. In June 1967, the Court ruled that King and his colleagues were guilty of having violated, in April 1963, the City of Birmingham's injunction against parading without a permit. "We knew that if the justices ruled against King," recalled Charles V. Hamilton, "then no other black leader could expect much when he ran afoul of racist justice."[118]

The most serious difficulty confronting King and the SCLC was that of persuading young blacks to abandon rioting in favour of nonviolent demonstrations. Surveys of black opinion were not encouraging. In 1963, Newsweek found that among low-income Northern blacks, only half believed in nonviolence, and 62 per cent thought that blacks would win in a violent conflict with whites.[119] Three years later, fewer blacks of all ages and social classes believed that equality could be achieved without resorting to violence. Among black leaders, only 48 per

cent thought that violence would be unnecessary, compared with 93 per cent in 1963.[120] When it came to Black Power, a quarter of those interviewed approved it, and only a minority actually opposed it.[121] Defined in a confusing variety of ways, the strident assertiveness of the slogan gave it wide popularity. "Whatever may be read into the meaning of 'Black Power,'" commented the Chicago Defender, "it is quite evident that the doctrine of passive resistance as preached by Dr King is ebbing."[122]

Declining faith in nonviolence was also evident in the ghetto riots that were erupting with ever-increasing frequency. A host of studies found that a significant proportion of the black community participated in riots. The Los Angeles Riot Study estimated that between 15 and 20 per cent of Watts' residents had taken an active part in the 1965 outbreak, while an additional 35 to 40 per cent had been "active spectators." "A significant number of Negroes," the study warned, " . . . are emotionally prepared for violence as a strategy or solution to end the problems of segregation, exploitation, and subordination."[123]

The riots would be easier to dismiss if those who rioted were the black criminal underclass, the "riff-raff" of the ghetto population. But such was not the case. The rioters were generally better educated than most blacks, more politically aware and more politically active. They were, according to T.M. Tomlinson, "the cream of urban Negro youth."[124] Secondly, although only a minority--

albeit a large one--actively took part in riots, many more sympathised with them, and believed they would produce beneficial changes. In Watts, for example, 52 per cent of black males were convinced that the riot there had made whites more sympathetic to black problems, and a remarkable 38 per cent of Newsweek's leadership sample considered the riots to have helped the civil rights cause.[125] "Most Negroes," wrote Angus Campbell and Edward Schuman, "see the riots as mainly a protest, partly or wholly justified."[126]

White attitudes towards the riots revealed the intractable nature of King's problem. "It is hard to conceive of a set of episodes better designed to bring forth from white people all their worst possible prejudices than the riots," wrote William Brink and Louis Harris.[127] Almost half of the whites interviewed by Harris attributed the riots to the work of "outside agitators;" most seemed "unaware or unbelieving of some of the conditions the Negro considers most responsible."[128] The 1967 riots, and the white response to them, brought King to the edge of despair. "I seriously question the will and moral power of this nation to save itself," he told Coretta. "People expect me to have answers, and I don't have any answers."[129]

The Origins of the Poor People's Campaign

In October 1967, after giving testimony to the

Kerner Commission, King repeated his plan to initiate a campaign of civil disobedience, to "just camp here by the thousands and thousands . . . and make it clear that the city will not function."[130] A month later, the Poor People's Campaign was announced: the SCLC would lead representatives of the poor people of all races to Washington, where they would petition the President and Congress to alleviate their economic distress. From ten cities and five rural areas, 3,000 poor people would erect a shantytown in the capital and "stay until America responds."[131] During the first phase of the campaign, delegations of the poor would lobby Congressional committees and government departments. In the absence of an adequate response, "Phase II" would consist of gradually escalating demonstrations and, if necessary, the poor volunteers would "dislocate the functioning" of Washington by disrupting traffic, packing the hospitals, and sitting-in at government offices.[132] Hopefully, the campaign would climax with massive demonstrations in Washington and fifteen cities around the country. "By the end of June we will have gotten some response or all of us will be in jail," predicted Andrew Young.[133]

King's approach to the problem of poverty proceeded from the simple assumption that poverty was caused by lack of income rather than personal inadequacies, lack of education or lack of training, and that the appropriate remedies were a guaranteed income, guaranteed jobs, and the

eradication of slum housing. That government had a responsibility to underwrite the economic well-being of each individual King had no doubt. In 1964 he had proposed a "Bill of Rights for the Disadvantaged;" since then he never wavered in his conviction that "the ultimate answer to the Negroes' economic dilemma will be found in a massive federal program for the poor."[134] Such thinking was by no means peculiar to King: Whitney Young of the Urban League had put forward a "Domestic Marshall Plan" for blacks, and Bayard Rustin and A. Philip Randolph advocated a "Freedom Budget" which would sharply increase government social spending.

King and other black leaders had greeted the War on Poverty with cautious enthusiasm; they soon became disenchanted with it. The programme was identified with waste, corruption and political manipulation, and King complained that its funds were so insufficient that the "so-called war" was "not even a good skirmish."[135] But King had more basic objections to the Economic Opportunity Act and the related measures which constituted the War on Poverty. It was piecemeal, funded with grudging parsimony and misconceived in approach. It was founded on the premise that the poor were poor because they were not equipped to take advantage of the opportunities inherent in the free market economy--hence its emphasis on training, education and family stability. But, as King and many others pointed out, this piecemeal, indirect approach to

poverty meant that a confusing multiplicity of programmes "never proceeded on a coordinated basis." Moreover, they did nothing to tackle the fundamental structural determinants of poverty and unemployment.[136]

By 1966, King was convinced that the elimination of poverty demanded more radical, thoroughgoing solutions, for "no matter how dynamically the economy develops and expands it does not eliminate all poverty." Training and education was a "cruel hoax" when there were simply not enough jobs.[137] The weaknesses of the free market economy were also illustrated by the fact that fully a third of poor families were headed by full-time wage-earners: their problem was that they were not given a sufficient wage. "Most of our poor are working every day, and that's not said enough," King emphasized. "They are working in full-time jobs for part-time income."[138] Hundreds of years of racism, continuing discrimination, the decline and mechanization of cotton production, the elimination of unskilled jobs by automation, the relocation of industry in the suburbs, and the increasing inequality in wage levels had created an "underclass," of which blacks and other racial minorities made up a large proportion.[139]

Many commentators believed that the Poor People's Campaign signified a major shift in King's thinking. The Campaign's demands, wrote Jose Yglesias, were "revolutionary for America: class demands dramatically expressed through other than the orderly democratic process." Jack H.

O'Dell, editor of Freedomways and King's friend, believed that the SCLC's leader was "rapidly developing into a Christian revolutionary."[140] They were undoubtedly correct in detecting a growing radicalization in King's thinking. His opposition to American neocolonialism abroad led him to cast a more critical eye on his country. "We must honestly face the fact," he told the SCLC in 1967, "that the Movement must address itself to the question of restructuring the whole of American society." As he admitted in early 1968: "In a sense, you could say we are engaged in the class struggle."[141]

But King had always been a populist. Before going to university he had come to realize that "the poor white was exploited just as much as the Negro," and that "the inseparable twin of racial injustice was economic injustice."[142] Slavery had brutally exploited blacks, but poor whites had been its "derivative victims."[143] As with slavery, so with segregation. In an historical interpretation that owed much to C. Vann Woodward, King charged that segregation had been introduced by the Bourbons as a deliberate "political strategem . . . to keep the Southern masses divided and Southern labor the cheapest in the land."[144] As King told his white captors when he was in the Birmingham jail: "You ought to be marching with us!" [145]

The extent to which white supremacy had "saturated the thinking of the poor white masses" had forced blacks in the South to move without allies. Nevertheless, King

believed that once the structure of de jure segregation had been smashed, blacks and poor whites would eventually end up as political allies. "The barriers of segregation are splintering under the strain of economic deprivation which cuts across caste lines," he wrote in 1965.[146] There were, moreover, sound tactical reasons for a strategy of interracial populism: there were twice as many white poor as black poor. King had many discussions about poverty with Gunnar Myrdal, and agreed that "there is no hope just trying to solve the problem for Negroes." The poor of all races would have to be included to prevent ethnic warfare.[147] This was one of the reasons for King's opposition to Black Power. He judged the slogan unfortunate because "automation and other forces have made the economic question fundamental for blacks and whites alike. In this context a slogan 'Power for Poor People' would be much more appropriate."[148] The Poor People's Campaign was a logical development of King's deeply ingrained populist thinking.

The Strategy of the Poor People's Campaign

Despite the discouraging political climate, King believed that the Poor People's Campaign could succeed. Firstly, he refused to admit that the urban riots of 1966-7 had precluded the possibility of effective non-violent direct action in the North. Pointing out the absence of planning and organization, he denied that riots

were "incipient forms of rebellion."[149] In fact, the rioters had been remarkably restrained in their behaviour: their violence was directed "against property rather than people." Sniping had been extremely rare; when it had been employed, it was to intimidate rather than kill. The word "riot", King contended, was a misnomer, for there had been very little anti-humanistic violence on the part of blacks: "The much publicized 'death toll' that marked the riots, and the many injuries, were overwhelmingly inflicted by the military."[150] A close analysis of the riots would reveal that "in their desperate essence" they had "a core of nonviolence toward people."[151]

Numerous riot studies confirmed the truth of King's assertions. Rather than being aggressive rebellions, the riots were essentially defensive: spontaneous resistance to specific incidents that were perceived as typical of a general pattern of brutal police behaviour. No attempts were made to "invade" white areas: the rioters wished only to assert a symbolic control over the area in which they lived. Moreover, anti-white hostility was largely confined to attacks on the police, and the looting and burning of white-owned stores. Libraries, schools, public buildings, and black-owned stores were usually left alone.[152] The casualty figures told the true story of the riots: of the 83 who died, and the 1,897 who were injured in the 1967 outbreaks, the Kerner Commission reported that "the overwhelming majority were Negroes."[153]

Riot studies also repudiated the notion that the riots had revolutionary aims. Most blacks regarded the Watts riot as a protest "to call the attention of whites to Negro problems; " they believed (wrongly) that it would change white attitudes for the better.[154] Most blacks, moreover, including those who rioted, had not yet lost faith in the political system as a whole, nor were they repudiating established black leaders.[155] The riots were expressions of neither irrational anarchy nor emerging revolutionism. Rather, as David Sears and John McConohay concluded, "the riots served as an alternative mechanism of grievance redress, which many blacks resorted to because they believed normal mechanisms had not worked satisfactorily."[156]

King believed that the Poor People's Campaign could succeed for another reason: by focusing on the question of poverty and unemployment, it would be possible to involve, through self-interest, a wide variety of different groups. He regarded Black Power as a dead-end philosophy which only succeeded in alienating whites. However, a campaign based on "Poor People's Power" would involve people of all races. "It must not be just black people," he told Coretta. "We must include American Indians, Puerto Ricans, the Mexicans, and even poor whites."[157] Accordingly, fifty-three non-black organizations were invited to meet in Atlanta, where, on March 14, 1968, they unanimously endorsed the Campaign. "This will be

the broadest coalition of minorities ever built," King predicted.[158]

King also had high hopes that the Campaign would win the support of young people, both black and white. Despairing of reform through conventional political structures, young radicals of both races were tending to "dissipate energy in hysterial talk" of violence and revolution, and "to break up into mutually suspicious groups."[159] King was nonetheless convinced that mutual hostility and the tendency toward nihilistic despair would be lessened if young radicals were given the opportunity to join an action movement of sufficient strength and militancy. Ideological divisions were largely due to the absence of such a movement. Demonstrations, on the other hand, "have served as unifying forces in the movement; they have brought blacks and whites together in very practical situations, where philosophically they may have been arguing about Black Power."[160] A campaign of mass civil disobedience would unite radicals, hippies, and young "moderates" in a "new action-synthesis" which would help revive the civil rights movement.[161]

Although he warned that the Poor People's Campaign would be "militantly demanding, not begging," King admitted that 3,000 nonviolent demonstrators would not be able to coerce Congress and the federal government. Although civil disobedience might be employed, "we are not depending on that only, but on the response of the people

of the Nation."[162] The Washington campaign was intended to be a "Selma-like movement" which, if "powerful enough, dramatic enough, and morally appealing enough," would attract the support of "the churches, labor, liberals, intellectuals," and all people of goodwill. If any group could reunite white liberals, Black power militants, black integrationists, and white radicals, it was the SCLC. King commanded respect and influence among white liberals and white clergymen, he was a prominent leader of the peace movement, and he cooperated with both the separatist and integrationist black organizations. By the time of his assassination, the Poor People's Campaign had been endorsed by a host of organizations, black and white, including the American Federation of Teachers, Stokely Carmichael's Black United Front, and the Anglican, Lutheran and Jewish churches of Washington, D.C.[163] The Campaign was enabling the SCLC to serve as the "radical middle" of a revived civil rights movement. "For two years," said King, "we have been discussing philosophy," which had bred disunity and despair. "I believe that this action will create new alliances, wake new forces."[164]

Judged by its stated demands, the Poor People's Campaign appeared doomed to failure. The SCLC was seeking the passage of an "Economic Bill of Rights for the Disadvantaged," along the lines of John Conyers' Full Opportunity Bill, a measure which, over three years, would create three million new jobs, raise the minimum wage,

establish family allowances, and build one million low-income housing units each year. But it would cost thirty billion dollars, an unlikely sum from a Congress that had just cut the poverty programme from 2.4 billion dollars to 1.8 billion, slashed the Model Cities and rent subsidy programmes, and refused to appropriate forty million dollars for a rat-control bill.[165] King and his aides were realistic enough to know that they could expect little from such a Congress. Public rhetoric apart, the real strategy of the SCLC was to pressure President Johnson into making some kind of public pledge to help the poor, even if it were merely a more vigorous and thorough implementation of existing federal programmes. As Andrew Young later conceded, "We were trying to hold ground we had won. We weren't trying to win new victories."[166]

Opposition to the Campaign from King's Friends and Associates

Many of King's friends and allies considered the Poor People's Campaign to be dangerously misconceived. John A. Morsell of the NAACP predicted that it "would be met with as an insurrection."[167] Bayard Rustin had similar misgivings. At a meeting of King's informal research committee, he warned against using civil disobedience. In the prevailing climate of political reaction, such tactics would be counter-productive. They would also attract to the protest "the most irresponsible and uncontrollable elements," making the maintenance of nonviolent

discipline impossible.[168] Michael Harrington also doubted the Campaign's chances of success: "the current Congress was a miserable one. . . . . we were afraid it wouldn't register in the public eye as a victory."[169] Joseph Rauh, chairman of Americans for Democratic Action and one of King's informal political advisors, opposed the Campaign for another reason: he was afraid that it would harm the Presidential campaign of Senator Eugene McCarthy.[170]

The doubts of his own staff were even more unsettling to King, especially since the SCLC had only recently been restructured in an effort to improve its efficiency and internal discipline. Andrew Young had been promoted to the new office of Executive Vice President, to become, with Ralph Abernathy, King's principal lieutenant. In addition, two outsiders had joined the executive staff: William A. Rutherford (a businessman rather than a civil rights activist) replaced Young as Executive Director, and Bernard Lafayette, a veteran of SNCC, became Program Administrator (a position previously held by Randolph Blackwell). A new "last-say" central steering committee comprising King, Abernathy, Young, Rutherford, and Lafayette, was designed to render policy-making firmer and more consistent.[171]

More than any other campaign, the Washington project was King's brain-child, and he was disappointed that the reorganization of the Conference had failed to bring about the kind of unity of purpose that was essential to its success. When the campaign was first discussed, James

Bevel had proposed that the SCLC make peace in Vietnam its foremost priority. He contended that students and young people saw the war as their primary enemy; he doubted that the Poor People's Campaign would arouse their support. Then there was the problem of tactics. "Where do you ultimately put pressure on the man?" he asked. "I do not know whether Johnson would give enough opposition for us to build up steam and momentum."[172] Bevel's doubts about the campaign were honest and open. More disturbing to King was the lack of enthusiasm he detected in the staff as a whole, its failure to sustain him at a time of great crisis and challenge, as well as its weakening commitment to nonviolence. "Dr King's faith was draining because even people inside the organization were running around the country spouting talk about violence," remembered Andrew Young in 1969.[173]

King's dissatisfaction with his lieutenants came to a head during a staff meeting on March 30, 1968, two days after a march he led in Memphis had degenerated into a minor riot. "We were trying to organize the Poor People's March," said Young. "We felt we didn't have any business going to Memphis."[174] King, however, was emotionally committed to helping the city's striking sanitation workers, and criticized his staff for failing to perceive that struggle as a crucial test of nonviolent tactics. How could they expect the Washington campaign to succeed if the SCLC could not stage a peaceful march in Memphis?

"Before we can go to Washington, something has to happen within this staff," he warned, and, displaying open anger, he enumerated the weaknesses of each participant, "calling the roll, just going around the room until he got all of us to feeling bad."[175] At one point, when Jesse Jackson persisted in airing his doubts about the Washington project, King delivered him a scathing rebuke and left the meeting in disgust. "I had never seen him so depressed," Ralph Abernathy later recalled.[176]

Disturbed by his behaviour, and chastened by his criticisms, the staff rallied to King's support. They reaffirmed their commitment to nonviolence, deciding to dismiss three SCLC workers for talking violently.[177] More importantly, they admitted the necessity of staging another march in Memphis, vowing that "we cannot and will not be intimidated by the violence that occurred."[178] Toward the end of the staff meeting, Abernathy reassured Coretta King that "We are all together now. We're going to Washington by way of Memphis."[179]

CHAPTER X

THE DECLINE OF THE SCLC AND THE YEARS OF REACTION

I. MEMPHIS AND THE POOR PEOPLE'S CAMPAIGN

The Memphis Campaign

The SCLC's involvement in Memphis was unplanned. King, however, considered the Memphis struggle a challenge he could not shirk. For one thing, the Rev. James M. Lawson, Jr., an old friend and associate, was a leader of the strike. Lawson had already persuaded Roy Wilkins and Bayard Rustin to speak in Memphis, and he implored King to do the same. Never one to refuse a "Macedonian call for aid", King addressed a strike rally on March 17, promising to lead a march five days later.[1]

The unity and determination of the black community was another reason why King felt attracted to Memphis. As J. Edwin Stanfield wrote at the time, "Those who have proclaimed the civil rights movement dead and buried may have to take another look at such phenomena as Memphis."[2] The cause of the striking sanitation workers had attracted a broad spectrum of support that recalled the civil rights coalition of 1963-5. The NAACP staged nightly court-house vigils, demonstrations and rallies.[3] Jerry Wurf, the white leader of the workers' national union, assumed a personal role in the strike, and the Memphis AFL-CIO, with the Tennessee State Labor Council, used its weight to defeat anti-strike legislation.[4] In downtown

marches, white trade unionists and students marched alongside the black sanitation workers. As Bayard Rustin predicted, "This fight is going to be won because the black people . . . and the trade unions stand together."[5] Equally impressive--especially to King--was the participation of the black clergy. With James Lawson, the Rev. Ralph Jackson, head of the Minimum Salary Project of the AME church, had brought together about seventy-five of Memphis' black ministers in support of the strike. Many of them marched in the demonstrations; some went to jail. Their involvement, Baxton Bryant told Mayor Loeb, "has done more to bring the Negro community together than ten years of work." The degree of clerical participation was gratifying to King, another reason for his decision to join the strike's leadership. "It's a beautiful sight," he said, "to see all these ministers of the gospel "in the forefront of the struggle.[6]

There were other, deeper motives behind King's involvement in Memphis. The issues at stake in the garbage strike--an increased minimum wage, a dues checkoff and, above all, union recognition--were exactly the kinds of issues that he intended to dramatize in the Poor People's campaign. "Most of our poor are working every day," he had recently said.[7] What was happening in Memphis typified the predicament of the working poor, and, like Bayard Rustin, King had always urged blacks to work for economic advancement from within the labour movement. It was,

therefore, entirely appropriate that he should promise to make Memphis "the beginning of the Washington movement."[8]

Finally, King viewed Memphis as a contest blacks could not afford to lose. If they were defeated there, reaction and repression would so intensify as to take the nation to the edge of a police state. "Today," he wrote in his last article, "the Northern cities have taken on the conditions we faced in the South. Police, national guard and other armed bodies are feverishly preparing for repression."[9] Nowhere was this more apparent than in Memphis. On February 23, the police had attacked a peaceful march with clubs and chemical spray; later, from the Governor of Tennessee, came 3,000 national guardsmen for what was described as a "riot control mobilization exercise."[10] The repression came to a climax on March 28, during a march which King intended to lead. When a group of young blacks began to break windows, the police indiscriminately attacked the column. One person was killed, sixty-two were injured and two hundred were arrested. Although there had been no shooting on the part of the black youths, the Police Director believed that there was a state of "general guerrilla warfare. Yes, we have a war in the city of Memphis."[11]

These events illustrated, in King's mind, a national trend toward naked repression of black protest. The truth was, he felt, that relatively minor incidents of black violence were being used as an excuse for ignoring black

demands and intimidating the black community. Mayor Henry Leob strenuously denied that his argument with the sanitation workers was a racial one. "The strike," he insisted, "is illegal, and you can't deal with an illegality."[12] Yet his anti-union outlook mingled with a vein of thinly-concealed racism. In a revealing comment, Loeb vowed, "I'll never be known as the mayor who signed a contract with a Negro union."[13] Violence on the part of blacks, King believed, simply played into the hands of men like Loeb, opening the door to greater repression. Nonviolence, on the other hand, "was never more relevant as an effective tactic," because, as in the South, the white authorities "could not shoot down in daylight unarmed men, women and children."[14] More than the outcome of a garbage strike was at stake in Memphis: nonviolence was fighting for its life.

King's Assassination and the Second March

In the days following the March 30 staff meeting, King's top aides worked in Memphis to prepare for the second march (scheduled for April 5). This time it was meticulously planned. Local groups were consulted, marshals were trained in nonviolence, plans were made to import outside celebrities, and the SCLC made a special effort to win the cooperation of the Invaders, a youth group committed to Black Power. On April 4, SCLC lawyers overturned an injunction against the march, a victory

which elated King and his lieutenants.[15]

In his last speech, King emphasized the historical significance of the Memphis struggle. The garbage strike was important, he said, because it symbolized what was happening in the second half of the twentieth century: "Something is happening in Memphis; something is happening in our world. The masses of the people are rising up and, wherever they are assembled . . . the cry is always the same, 'We want to be free.'" It was vital to stage a successful nonviolent march so as to "put the issue where it really is." The trouble with violence--no matter how minor--was that it gave whites an excuse to ignore the underlying injustice. Only nonviolence could show the world that Memphis was being unfair to its public servants, and that "Mayor Loeb is in dire need of a doctor." Memphis was now in the forefront of the struggle for economic justice, just as Montgomery and Birmingham had been in the fight for human dignity. "We have got to see this thing through."[16]

The previous day, the city's attorney general had admitted that, "we are fearful that . . . someone may harm Dr King's life."[17] Since the first day of the Montgomery bus boycott, King had lived under the threat of assassination. The murder of John F. Kennedy had prompted him to predict a similar fate for himself. "This is what is going to happen to me also," he told Coretta. "I keep telling you, this is a sick society."[18] But it was in Chicago,

three years later, he said, that "I faced the inevitability of death for the first time."[19] Since then, he had conquered the fear of death. "I may die in this movement. /But/ I don't mind, I settled that long ago," he told his staff, and urged them to do likewise. "I don't think anybody can be free until you solve this problem."[20]

In the closing minutes of his final speech, King dwelt upon his own death in the manner of a man who regarded his work as essentially complete. He was glad, he said, to have survived an attempt on his life in 1959, living to witness and be part of the sit-ins, the Freedom Rides, and the great movements in Albany, Birmingham and Selma. Even as he arrived in Memphis, his life had been threatened; he did not know "what would happen to me from some of our sick white brothers."

> But it really doesn't matter with me now, because I've been to the mountaintop. I won't mind. Like anybody, I would like to live a long life; longevity has its place. But I'm not concerned about that now. I just want to do God's will. And He's allowed me to go up to the mountain. And I've looked over. And I've seen the Promised Land. I may not get there with you. But I want you to know tonight that we as a people will get to the Promised Land. So I'm happy tonight. I'm not worried about anything. I'm not fearing any man. 'Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord. . . .'[21]

Four days later, 20,000 marched in silence to a memorial rally where they were addressed by, among others, Ralph Abernathy, James Bevel, Walter Reuther, Jerry Wurf, Bayard Rustin, and Coretta King. On April 16, the City

of Memphis acceded to the sanitation workers' demands for an increased wage, a dues checkoff and union recognition. Upon ratifying the written agreement (the first of its kind in the city's history), the strikers "broke into thunderous cheering."[22]

The Poor People's Campaign

The Poor People's Campaign was conducted by an organization that was demoralized and plagued by internal conflicts. To make matters worse, the SCLC lacked a coherent strategy for achieving its ill-defined objectives; Resurrection City became a tactical vacuum in which frustrated militancy led to confusion and indiscipline. Rather than vindicating the SCLC's "belief in the power of nonviolence and . . . faith in the democratic processes of government," the campaign exposed the impotence of nonviolence in the face of a government that was indifferent or hostile to the demands of the poor.[23]

Resurrection City, a plywood and canvas shantytown constructed near the Washington Monument, was intended to bring home to the Congress and the nation the desperate plight of America's poor people. Instead, it became, predictably, a slum, and was characterized by the attendant problems of disorganization, dirt, violence, and petty crime. As Bayard Rustin had predicted, the SCLC, with a staff of only one hundred and fifty, proved incapable of keeping order among the City's three thousand inhabitants.[24]

The members of the Chicago and Memphis youth gangs were a particular threat to discipline. Within two weeks of the campaign's commencement, more than two hundred of them had to be sent home. "They went around and beat up on our white people . . . and were hostile to the press," Andrew Young explained. "We had to get them out."[25]

Even after their departure, Resurrection City continued to suffer from daily incidents of crime and violence, prompting the chief security marshal to resign in despair.[26] "We didn't bring saints to Resurrection City," said Young. Nevertheless, with the press inevitably dwelling upon the mud, disorganization and petty violence, the City became, as one SCLC staffer admitted, "a noose around our necks."[27] The purpose of nonviolent direct actionwas to expose the brutality of the oppressor. In Washington, where the oppressor was a faceless bureaucracy and an unrepresentative system of government, the focus of the campaign became Resurrection City itself, a focus which, as Joseph Kraft observed, "obscured the central point of the Poor People's Campaign."[28] After six weeks of unfavourable publicity, Andrew Young admitted that "whoever closed us down may have done us a favor."[29]

When the campaign was in the planning stage, Hosea Williams had argued against the shantytown idea. Instead, he proposed that the demonstrators be housed in private homes throughout the city. He believed that "We had to move the Washington community," in the same way that the

SCLC had aroused the black people of Birmingham and Selma.[30] Few black Washingtonians, however, joined the campaign; only 50,000 people, half of them white, attended the June 19 "Solidarity Day" rally.[31] The absence of local support was only partly attributable to the April riot, which had left the black community fearful and emotionally exhausted. Confused leadership and inadequate consultation by the SCLC were equally important factors. In January, a prominent black minister had warned that although "We are prepared to identify with a clear set of discernible goals" for the campaign, "The longer Dr King keeps this community . . . in the dark, the greater is his loss of potential support."[32]

King had been well aware of this danger and, during February and March, spent much of his time in the capital, also strengthening the SCLC's office there.[33] However, the campaign underway, Resurrection City voraciously consumed the Conference's energy and resources. Apart from the problem of maintaining discipline, running the City--a task for which the SCLC was ill-suited--took up so much of the staff's time that it had little opportunity to go out into the larger community to recruit support. To the Black United Front, a local coalition headed by Stokely Carmichael (which originally backed the campaign), it was the old story of the SCLC ignoring the local population. In an angry statement, the BUF accused the Conference of causing ill-considered civil disturbances

from which, through increased repression, the black population as a whole suffered.[34]

The vagueness of the campaign's goals was another reason for its lukewarm support. There were sound tactical reasons for not tieing the campaign to specific bills during its initial stages. But, as the weeks went by, the SCLC failed to successfully dramatize, from the ninety demands it originally presented, a key objective around which public attention could focus and public opinion rally. "Congress," said Bayard Rustin, "felt trapped by Mr Abernathy's nameless demands for an instant millenium."[35]

In reality, the SCLC was painfully aware that most of its demands were unattainable, especially, as Andrew Young put it, "with an asinine Congress like this." Its principal demands were, therefore, addressed to the executive branch, so as to bypass the need for new legislation. In effect, the Conference was asking for more spending on existing programmes and a greater orientation toward the needs of the poor.[36] Some of Abernathy's lieutenants were skeptical about the whole campaign. Admitted one: "We didn't really expect it to be very much, if anything." This gap between its public insistence on a host of extravagant measures and its private willingness to accept the most meagre of concessions undermined the SCLC's credibility and frustrated its supporters.[37]

Tactical confusion was a direct consequence of vague goals. In Birmingham and Selma, the SCLC had

employed nonviolent direct action with consumate skill, picking clear and vulnerable targets, gradually escalating its demonstrations, and engineering dramatic confrontations which mobilized public opinion in its favour. King envisaged a similar strategy for the Poor People's Campaign, promising to "escalate the campaign on the basis of the response we get." At the same time, as April drew closer, he de-emphasized talk of disruption, becoming more conciliatory in tone.[38] King knew that although direct action could be a powerful sanction, it would be foolish to attempt to coerce Congress and the federal government. Demonstrations would be instruments of persuasion, culminating in a "symbolic act" of civil disobedience which would expose the wrongdoing of Congress and arouse public opinion across the nation.[39]

Abernathy and his aides violated the basic rules of nonviolent direct action, and the Poor People's Campaign never followed the strategy planned by King. The SCLC's hyperbolic rhetoric and incompetent demonstrations failed to arouse public sympathy. When the campaign began, Andrew Young promised "the greatest nonviolent demonstration since Gandhi's salt march to the sea," and James Bevel predicted that "We may be here two or three years."[40] It was not until late in May, however, that direct action was employed, and the demonstrations and sit-ins were badly-disciplined, poorly led, and did not appear to be part of any consistent strategy.[41] In Birmingham, and

in Selma, more than three thousand people went to jail. Less than five hundred did so in Washington.

Bayard Rustin's appointment as the campaign's national coordinator brought all these proplems to a head. Consistent with his earlier advice to King, Rustin insisted that the demands be narrowed and clarified "in a way that makes Congressional action possible."[42] Accordingly, he listed five demands which he considered "now attainable": the creation of one million public service jobs, extension of collective bargaining rights to agricultural workers, restoration of cuts in the poverty programme, repeal of the 1967 welfare restrictions, and the construction of six million units of public housing over the next decade. In addition, as a condition of his accepting the post, Rustin sought a commitment from Abernathy that the SCLC would not engage in civil disobedience.[43] The press and liberals in Congress praised Rustin's statement of demands. It was strenuously opposed, however, by Hosea Williams and others in the SCLC. Calling Rustin's manifesto "a bunch of jazz and nonsense," Williams objected to the ban on direct action, the absence of any condemnation of the war in Vietnam, and the omission of the demands of the Indian, Puerto Rican and Mexican-American groups.[44] Caught in the middle of this dispute, Abernathy procrastinated, causing Rustin to resign in frustration on June 7. Because he commanded considerable respect in both the Democratic party and the labour movement, Rustin's resignation was a

severe blow to the campaign.[45]

Under the stresses and tensions of Resurrection City, the personal conflicts which King had always managed to suppress came to the surface. There was, throughout the campaign, a persistent antagonism between Hosea Williams and Andrew Young, who considered the former's threatening-sounding statements both foolish and harmful. James Bevel, his heart never really in the campaign, ran Resurrection City with what New Republic termed "an almost studied arrogance." His successor, Jesse Jackson, was popular with the City's residents, but brought about his own demotion by leading an ill-considered demonstration at the Department of Agriculture. Few observers could help but detect a lack of firm leadership.[46]

In contrast to its ambitious objectives, the campaign won only minor bureaucratic concessions, chief of which were the addition of two hundred counties to the surplus food programme and the granting of a right of appeal to welfare recipients who were ordered struck off the rolls under restrictive new regulations. Even the campaign's unstated minimum demand that social spending be pegged at its current level was not met: the poverty programme was reduced for the third successive year.[47] On June 24, Resurrection City was closed down by the police; the National Park Service presented the SCLC with a bill for $71,000. "We came up to stay," said Andrew Young. "Now its all gone."[48]

The Poor People's Campaign, King admitted, would be a gamble: "We're riding on the forces of history and not totally shaping things."[49] The forces of history, however, were working against the SCLC: whites were as hostile to the campaign's demands as blacks were favourable, and the attitude of the national legislature faithfully reflected the majority opinion.[50] Most Congressmen, apart from a contingent of about seventy-five liberals, echoed the indignation of Senator Robert C. Byrd. In a speech written for him with the help of the FBI, and addressed to the Senate on March 29, Byrd branded King as a coward and rabble-rouser, and condemned his project as a recipe for "violence, destruction, looting, and bloodshed."[51] Congress, Gunnar Myrdal observed, was obsessed with "how to stop it." Social legislation languished, forgotten, in Congressional committees; twenty-six bills designed to curb the campaign were reported within days. Senator Russell Long's fear that Congress would make poverty "an enjoyable way of life" was groundless.[52]

II. THE NIXON REACTION

The 1968 Election and the Relaxation of the Federal Civil Rights Enforcement Effort

Blacks in 1968 voted overwhelmingly for Hubert Humphrey. Whites, by contrast, alarmed by black demands for school integration and open housing, had been defecting

from the Democratic party since 1966. Two years later, the defections had reached such a volume that Samuel Lubell wrote, "at the local level in many cities the New Deal coalition no longer exists."[53] Race, the Democrats' political undoing, was the Republicans' political opportunity. George Wallace had already demonstrated the strength of racism outside the South, and it was the political genius of Richard Nixon to perceive race as the cement which would bind together a new political alignment of traditional Republicans, the white South, and a section of the Northern white working-class: the non-black, non-young, non-radical "Silent Majority." It was only after his election in 1968, however, that this new alignment could gain any degree of permanence. His 1968 plurality had been a product of fear and prejudice and, divided by conflicting economic interests, it could only be sustained if those emotions were kept alive. It was for this purpose that, as Lubell observed, "the Nixon presidency. . . sought not political reconciliation, but a sharpening of divisions in the nation."[54]

The effect of this strategy (misleadingly termed the "Southern strategy") was glaringly apparent in the Nixon Administration's civil rights policy. "Richard Nixon suggested . . . that we should all lower our voices," wrote Roger Wilkins. "Though he clearly did not always abide by that precept, he kept his pledge in civil rights."[55] Nixon's election ushered in a bleak period for black

Americans. For the first time since the days of Woodrow Wilson, said Bishop Stephen Co. Spottswood of the NAACP, "the national administration has made it a matter of calculated policy to work against the needs and aspirations of the largest minority of its citizens."[56]

The curtailment of school integration was the key element in Nixon's strategy to win Southern white support. By 1968, Southern resistance to school desegregation had passed the days of Massive Resistance and standing in the school-house door. Noting the rising hostility of Northern whites to busing, Southern segregationists were now attempting to forge a national consensus against "forced" integration. Their new tactics consisted of endorsing the principle of integration, while preserving it in practice by gaining federal approval of weak, "freedom of choice" desegregation plans which did not provide for large-scale busing. A more conservative Supreme Court, they hoped, would issue a firm ruling against the practice of busing to achieve racial balance in schools.

Nixon tacitly endorsed this strategy. "If we are to be realists," he explained, "we must recognize that in a free society there are limits to the amount of government coercion that can reasonably be used."[57] Through administrative delay, the easing of HEW guidelines, and the virtual abandonment of Title VI sanctions against recalcitrant school systems the Administration attempted to slow down the pace of school desegregation in the South. By

1970, encouraged by these signs, the governors of Georgia, Florida and Louisiana were counselling open defiance of court-ordered desegregation, and anti-integration violence flared in several states.[58] In October, the US Commission on Civil Rights reported that the federal civil rights enforcement effort had all but broken down, and Newsweek pessimistically concluded that "school integration might already have spent itself far short of realization."[59]

In the sphere of economic assistance, the Nixon Administration's sole concession to blacks was the setting up of an Office of Minority Business Enterprise for the purpose of encouraging "black capitalism." The OMBE, unfortunately, was not authorised to finance loans, nor was it empowered to discipline government departments of private lending institutions which discriminated against minority businesses.[60] As a consequence of what Whitney Young described as "the suicidal economic policy" of the Nixon Administration, blacks suffered disproportionately from the economic recessions that occurred between 1969 and 1973. Official (low) estimates of black unemployment rose from 4.9 to 8.9 per cent; median black family income as a proportion of median white family income fell from 61 to 58 per cent.[61] The Administration's economic policies, observed the New York Times, embodied a "laissez-faire attitude that is, to many black Americans, a kind

of spiritual disfranchisement."[62]

The Suppression of Black Protest: the FBI

The suppression of black protest, encouraged or instigated by the federal government, did not begin with the inauguration of Richard Nixon. Civil rights activists had long suspected that the FBI was engaging in a campaign to infiltrate black organizations and discredit black leaders. "We've known for years that they've been doing it. . . . You just pick up the telephone," said Ralph Abernathy in 1970. "You don't have to be a Philadelphia lawyer to know that someone is listening."[63]

Three years later, prompted to come forward by the Watergate revelations, an ex-FBI agent confirmed what had for years been an open secret. The Bureau's surveillance of King, he said, "was massive and complete. He couldn't wriggle. They had him." For three years, beginning in 1963, the FBI had tapped the SCLC's Atlanta and New York offices, as well as King's private home, and even his hotel and motel bedrooms. The doctored results of these wiretaps, the ex-agent disclosed, had been used in an unsuccessful attempt to persuade politicians, journalists and religious leaders to shun King.[64]

It was only in 1975, when two Congressional committees investigated the FBI, that the full scope of the Bureau's campaign against King and the civil rights movement was revealed. Testifying before the Senate

Select Committee to Study Government Operations with respect to Intelligence Activities (the Church Committee), the Assistant Director of the FBI admitted that "no holds were barred. . . . This is a rough, tough business."[65] In 1967, the Bureau had initiated a Counter Intelligence Program (COINTELPRO) for the purpose of disrupting civil rights and black nationalist organizations, and "Preventing the rise of a messiah who could unify, and electrify, the militant black nationalist movement." King, the FBI believed, was a "real contender for this position."[66] It appears likely that the violence which erupted in Memphis on March 28, 1968, was caused or fomented by FBI agents provocateurs; the Bureau intended to alienate King's white liberal support by demonstrating that "acts of so-called nonviolence advocated by King cannotbe controlled."[67]

It would be wrong to dismiss the FBI's vendetta against King as an unfortunate but unavoidable relic of the McCarthy era, or ascribe it to an irrational personal antipathy toward King on the part of J. Edgar Hoover. Weighing the responsibility for the campaign, the Church Committee concluded:

> Officials in the Justice Department and the White House were aware . . . that the FBI reports on Dr King contained considerable information of a political and personal nature which was "irrelevant and spurious" to the stated reasons for the investigation. Those . . . officials were also aware that the FBI was disseminating vicious characterizations of Dr King within the Government . . . and that the FBI had offered to "leak" to reporters highly damaging accusations that some of Dr King's advisers were communists. 68

It is not clear how far the FBI succeeded in damaging the SCLC's effectiveness. "Since we don't really know all that they did, we have no way of knowing the ways that they affected us," said Andrew Young.[69] However, King's enormous prestige among white liberals, and his strict adherence to nonviolence and the democratic process, shielded the SCLC from outright repression. Groups that adopted a rhetoric of violence and an ideology of revolution were not so fortunate. By 1967, recalled Cleveland Sellers of SNCC, "The government was on the offensive and everyone who had taken a revolutionary position seemed to be fair game . . . . Some were guilty of the things charged against them. But most weren't."[70] Within a year, SNCC was decimated by state and federal indictments for such alleged offenses as draft resistance, assault and battery, resisting arrest, and incitement to riot. Those indicted included SNCC's veteran leaders: Stokely Carmichael, H. Rap Brown, Phil Hutchins, and Cleveland Sellers.[71]

The Black Panther Party, which emerged at the same time that SNCC was declining, became the next victim of government repression. Already included in the FBI's COINTELPRO campaign, in January 1969 the Panthers were officially categorized as a subversive threat to national security, becoming a primary target for FBI surveillance, infiltration and disruption. In August of the same year, the Justice Department set up a special task force on the

Panthers; by 1970, some twenty Panthers had lost their lives at the hands of the police. As the Assistant Attorney General put it: "The Panthers are a bunch of hoodlums. We've got to get them."[72]

The Suppression of Black Protest: "Law and Order."

The determination of the federal government to silence black radicals encouraged a wave of official violence in the South. The repression characteristically associated with the Nixon Administration actually began in February 1968, when three black students were killed during a demonstration by police and national guardsmen in Orangeburg, South Carolina. In defense of the killings, the governor of South Carolina claimed that the police had been forced to defend themselves against prolonged sniper fire. Faithfully accepted by the press, his statement was later proven to be false. Nevertheless, public reaction to the Orangeburg tragedy was one of indifference; it reflected, according to the Southern Regional Council, a "national tendency nearing a public policy" to respond to black protests with "massive police and military force."[73]

"Law and order" had been a prominent theme of Richard Nixon's 1968 campaign. Blacks, however, suspected that "law and order" was, in reality, a policy of encouraging local law enforcement authorities to crack down on black activists. The Jackson State and Augusta killings of 1970 appeared to be the inevitable product of such a policy:

at Jackson State College, Mississippi, a student dormitory was riddled by police gunfire, resulting in two deaths; in Augusta, Georgia, a disorderly demonstration ended with the deaths of six blacks, all of them shot in the back by Augusta policemen, many several times.[74]

State officials were predictably unrepentant about the slayings. Governor John Bell Williams of Mississippi had nothing but praise for the police, and Governor Lester Maddox of Georgia, ignoring the fact that there had been no sniping by the demonstrators, warned, "If they shoot at our guardsmen and firemen, they had better be prepared to meet their maker." Seemingly unaware that the demonstration had been staged to protest the fatal beating by the police of a mentally-retarded black youth, Maddox blamed the deaths on the "Communist enemies of freedom."[75] Only months before, a bi-racial committee had requested the Justice Department to investigate racism and brutality in the Augusta sheriff's department, but nothing had come of the request. Now, the Attorney General reacted to the killings by blandly condemning both "violent demonstrations" and "unrestrained reactions," a statement which, as Time observed, "seemingly equated rocks with bullets."[76]

Repression was by no means confined to the South. By 1969, however, Northern blacks had learnt through bitter experience that even minor disturbances would trigger massive police retaliation.[77] In many Northern cities, black areas were under constant and intensive

military surveillance, and black organizations under constant police watch. In Chicago, on the first anniversary of Martin Luther King's death, black militants and gang members were rounded up by the police, and troops patrolled streets in the slums from a 7 PM curfew until early the following morning.[78] Such repression united blacks in their opposition to the federal government, as evidenced by the uncharacteristically militant language of such moderate black leaders as Whitney Young. "I've never seen the black community quite as universally disillusioned and lacking in confidence about an Administration as I have this one," said Young.[79]

The Failure of the Black Revolutionaries

The assassination of Martin Luther King, and the collapse of SNCC and CORE, "left a tremendous void that no individual or organization has managed to fill," wrote Cleveland Sellers in 1973.[80] In this vacuum, leadership in the cities of the North passed to myriad local groups, most of which espoused some form of Black Power or black nationalism. As ex-SCLC aide C.T. Vivian put it: "The accent now is on power instead of persuasion."[81]

The most prominent of these groups was the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense, founded in Oakland, California, in 1966, by Huey Newton and Bobby Seale. However, the effectiveness of the Panthers was hampered by two factors. Firstly, as recounted above, the Panthers

became the victims of a nationwide campaign of repression that decimated their organization. Secondly, as Sellers pointed out, neither the Panthers nor the various black nationalist groups received "the same broad support that was lavished on SNCC, CORE, SCLC, the NAACP and the Urban League" during the early years of the 1960's.[82] Most blacks derived a distinct feeling of pride from the Panther's courageous militancy, but, owing to fear of repression, skepticism about their revolutionary programme, or a combination of the two, most also doubted the effectiveness of the Panthers as representatives of the black cause.[83]

Other groups with a similar political orientation were confronted with the same problem: lack of popular backing. Caught between white hostility and black fear and apathy, their revolutionary language disguised the frustration of powerlessness. The National Black Economic Development Conference epitomized this gulf between rhetoric and reality. The BEDC's "Black Manifesto," presented by James Forman, sought five billion dollars in reparations from the white churches and synagogues. But the BEDC lacked the political influence or white support to win more than a fraction of its target. "The BEDC was a façade," wrote Cleveland Sellers, "there weren't any warm bodies behind it."[84]

The fate of the black revolutionaries, especially that of the Black Panthers, demonstrated that local forces, encouraged by the federal government, would seize

upon incidents of minor violence, and even the verbal advocacy of violence, as an excuse to employ force to suppress black activism. Although the persecution of the Panthers provided a rallying-point for white liberals and blacks of every ideological persuasion, it had the intended effect of shattering the one organization that could have reunited the fragmented civil rights movement on a national basis.

The failure of the black revolutionaries had another, more profound, consequence: by driving down black expectations, it ushered in a period of quietism and apathy.[85] In contrast to the faith they had placed in the federal government during the 1960's, a 1970 Harris poll disclosed that most blacks expressed "profound cynicism about the American political system," a disillusionment which had "almost totally alienated blacks from government, both federal and local."[86]

Their pessimism was not misplaced. Surveying white attitudes across the nation, Time uncovered little but hostility toward black demands: "universal opposition to busing children to once-black schools, /and/ annoyance at what strikes whites as special treatment for blacks seeking education and jobs."[87] The 1972 Presidential election attested to the strength of such sentiments. Nixon's anti-busing proposals, wrote Roger Wilkins, "legitimated a flood of theretofore dammed-up anti-black feelings."[88] The incompetence of the McGovern campaign aside, white

opposition to integration was the primary source of support for Richard Nixon. As Jesse Jackson put it: "The real issue is not the bus. It's us."[89]

III. THE DECLINE OF THE SCLC

The SCLC After the Poor People's Campaign

The SCLC's greatest victories had been won under Democratic Administrations. In the Birmingham and Selma crises, the federal government had been goaded into action not only by the moral drama provided by the SCLC, but also by organized pressure from the President's party in Congress. The advent of a hostile administration rendered the SCLC's favourite weapon, direct action, ineffective. The Conference quixotically refused to let the Poor People's Campaign die, organizing a "Poor People's Embassy" in the capital, and presenting, in May 1969, a long list of legislative proposals to the Nixon Administration in what was described as "Chapter Two" of the Poor People's Campaign.[90] After a fruitless meeting with the President, Ralph Abernathy reported that "The poor . . . were arrogantly ignored, crudely rejected, and rudely dismissed."[91]

The Administration's studied hostility to the SCLC highlighted the need for new tactics in the continuing fight for black equality. Henceforth, Andrew Young predicted, the Conference would move "from the realm of symbol to the realm of power."[92] The SCLC's eleventh

annual convention, held in Memphis, strongly endorsed the principle of black power, while at the same time adhering to King's cherished values of nonviolence and interracial cooperation. In addition a (legacy of King's involvement in the Memphis sanitation strike) the Conference undertook to aid the working poor in their fight for union recognition. Despite the tragedy of April 4, the Washington Post could see "no agonizing apparent as SCLC faces the future."[93]

But behind the enthusiasm and fervour of the SCLC's return to Memphis, a debilitating absence of unity and confidence afflicted the survivors of King's crusade. "Like a great religious revival," observed one newpaper, "it needed the eloquence, insight and magnetism of a great leader."[94] Despite the public confirmation of Ralph Abernathy as King's chosen successor, the ghost of their former leader haunted the men and women who had assembled in Memphis to rededicate themselves to his dream. During the months and years that followed, nagging doubts about Abernathy's abilities produced a spiritual malaise in which the conflicts that had plagued Resurrection City thrived. By the end of 1968, the tensions and frustrations of the staff had become so acute that (on Andrew Young's suggestion) the SCLC's top staffers submitted themselves to two lengthy sessions of group psychoanalysis. "We've never buried Dr King," Young explained, "and we won't be able to do anything until we do."[95]

Without King to synthesize their ideas and harmonize their personalities, differences of policy exacerbated the personal antagonisms that had always been present among the staff. James Bevel was the first of the SCLC's veterans to leave. Early in 1969, Bevel proposed that the Conference concentrate upon ending the war in Vietnam, and unite with white radicals, black militants and peace groups in a campaign of massive civil disobedience in Philadelphia. To further dramatize the issue, Bevel had a startlingly novel idea: the SCLC should undertake to defend James Earl Ray, King's alleged assassin. A campaign for peace, Bevel argued, was the only way to keep King's ideals alive: "We've got to stop people from running around saying Dr King is dead. . . . He lives, man!" However, as the SCLC's lawyers pointed out, Bevel's idea was imaginative but legally impossible, and others, including Hosea Williams and Andrew Young, wished to reorient the SCLC toward political action.[96]

Bevel's departure at the end of the year marked the beginning of the disintegration of the small group which had stood with King since the Albany campaign. It was, perhaps, an inevitable development. As Young admitted, "We're an exhausted organization right now. . . . the toll of some ten years of constant pressure is beginning to tell on all of us."[97]

The Defection of Jesse Jackson and the Decline of the SCLC

By 1969, dissatisfaction with Ralph Abernathy's leadership had found a focus in the person of the Rev. Jesse L. Jackson. Jackson had joined the SCLC during the Selma campaign; he was still only twenty-eight. His rise had been swift. In Chicago, Jackson had created a branch of Operation Breadbasket which was one of the few successful aspects of the Chicago campaign. In 1967, with the SCLC's new emphasis on black economic development, Jackson became the national director of Operation Breadbasket, with instructions to repeat his Chicago success in cities throughout the nation, and thus enable the SCLC to call for a nationwide boycott by black consumers.[98] By 1968, Jackson had become one of King's top aides.

In the year that followed King's death, Chicago's Operation Breadbasket caught the attention of the press. At a time when the SCLC was struggling to defend the gains it had won, Breadbasket stood out as a refreshing success. Moreover, Breadbasket reconciled in action the apparent conflict between integration and Black Power. Decrying integration as "imitation and forced assimilation," Jackson exhorted blacks to accept the fact of their separation from whites, and admit that "much of our identity lies in our state of separation."[99] Social integration, he argued, was irrelevant to the problems of slum housing, unemployment and lack of income; "For too long," he

insisted, "we have used moral language to describe an economic problem."[100] The only useful type of integration, Jackson concluded, was the integration of blacks into the overall economy, thereby facilitating the equal sharing of its opportunities and benefits. And, the American political economy being what it is, economic integration could only succeed if "there is a capital base in the black community." As the SCLC groped for a new sense of direction, Jackson preached a clear and appealing message: "Black people must develop a private economy."[101]

Jackson's strategy for achieving that goal also managed to harmonize the principles of interracial cooperation and Black Power. He welcomed aid from whites, reminded his followers of the whites who had died in the civil rights movement, and emphasized that the racial conflict was blurred by the lines of class. But he also insisted that blacks could not afford to wait for voluntary acts of goodwill and generosity from the white majority. Black progress "is not based upon what the white man is going to do. It is based upon what we are going to do--and upon what we are going to make the Man do."[102] Jackson did not abandon King's vision of the "beloved community." He propounded that vision, however, in more pragmatic and hard-headed terms. His concern was not to bring about love between individuals, but to strive for "justice between institutions."[103] In an

economic context, justice and respect were both the products of power, and it was through the economic boycott that blacks could exercise group power. Operation Breadbasket, with its use of the consumer boycott, was a practical and imaginative application of Black Power. As the Los Angeles Times observed, "it is black in every respect. It is not an existing power structure handing anything to anyone; it is the winning of victories by blacks and for blacks."[104]

Rather than strengthening the SCLC, however, Jackson's rise to national prominence precipitated a leadership struggle that destroyed its potential for becoming an effective national organization.

In March 1969, Richard Levine wrote in Harper's magazine that Jesse Jackson was "probably the most powerful Negro in Chicago," and speculated whether he might be the "heir to Dr King."[105] That Jackson was ambitious there was no doubt. Before King's funeral he had propagated the myth that he had cradled the dying leader in his arms. Thereafter, consciously presenting himself as the living embodiment of King's ideals, his desire to replace Abernathy became an open secret.[106]

In many ways the elevation of Jackson to the Presidency of the SCLC would have been a logical decision. Jackson was youthful, a dynamic preacher, and possessed of clear and forceful ideas; he also headed the SCLC's most successful programme. Abernathy, by contrast, was

middle-aged, dull in his oratory, and frequently confused, insecure and indecisive as a leader. Yet Jackson's driving ambition offended many of the veteran SCLC staffers; they suspected him of using the Chicago chapter of Operation Breadbasket as a personal power base. Before his death, King had challenged Jackson to leave his "personal kingdom" in Chicago and repeat his success in other cities; his failure to do so severely damaged the SCLC's chances of developing a viable national structure. With thirty chapters existing on paper, Breadbasket was only effective in Chicago, Cleveland and New York. "When we put Jesse in charge of the boycott apparatus," said Andrew Young, "it was . . . so we could hit thirty or forty cities simultaneously. . . . But Jesse could never get out of Chicago to do it."[107]

In early 1970, the SCLC's board of directors attempted to resolve the conflict between Abernathy and Jackson by offering the latter the new post of Vice President-at-large.[108] Within a few months, however, the antagonism between Abernathy and Jackson had become so intense that the latter, with Chicago's Operation Breadbasket, had virtually seceded from the national SCLC. In 1971, after charges of financial irregularities in Breadbasket's Black Expo festivals, the SCLC suspended Jackson. The latter immediately resigned, taking Breadbasket with him.[109]

Jesse Jackson's departure was a disaster for the

SCLC. Operation Breadbasket was a successful and growing programme; Jackson was the most prominent black leader in Chicago and, perhaps, the North. Thus Jackson and Breadbasket were the keys to the development of the SCLC as a national civil rights organization. Without them the national structure of the Conference was wrecked beyond repair. With the launching of Operation PUSH--in effect the revamped Chicago chapter of Operation Breadbasket--Jackson emerged as a national civil rights leader, with a personal following (in the North at least) which rivalled that of Ralph Abernathy.[110] The defection of Jackson robbed the SCLC of one of its ablest officers at a time when other top aides were leaving. In 1970, Andrew Young resigned as Vice President to campaign for Congress; by the following year, Bernard Lafayette and William Rutherford had also left.[111]

After the Abernathy/Jackson schism, the decline of the SCLC was rapid and irreversible. In 1972, the drop in financial contributions was so steep that the staff was cut from sixty-one to twenty, a decision that prompted the resignation of Stoney Cooks, the Executive Director. By 1973, the Conference employed only seventeen field organizers, and in July Ralph Abernathy tendered his resignation as President. Citing the SCLC's catastrophic financial decline as the reason, he denounced those middle-class blacks who "now occupy high positions made possible through our struggle . . . but will not

support the SCLC financially."[112] Although, in fact, Abernathy rescinded his resignation at the SCLC's annual convention, it did nothing to revive his ailing organization. "If SCLC was to close its doors tomorrow . . . it wouldn't be missed," said John Lewis. "It's not in the communities."[113]

The SCLC in the South: Organizing the Working Poor

In spite of its precipitous decline after 1971, the SCLC played an important role in the South during the preceding three years. And, in addition to preserving and extending the gains of the civil rights movement by aiding local integration campaigns, the Conference broke new ground in its drive to aid in the organization of the working poor.

This new area of concern grew out of King's long-held conviction that blacks should "strive for enhanced representation and influence in the labor movement," and the SCLC's successful intervention in the Memphis sanitation strike. The alliance forged between the civil rights and trade union movements in Memphis was reaffirmed at the SCLC's 1968 convention, and strengthened by the Conference's support for a sanitation strike in Atlanta, in the course of which Ralph Abernathy, Hosea Williams, Andrew Young, and Joseph Lowery went to jail.[114] But it was in the Charleston hospital workers' strike of 1969 that the SCLC most convincingly demonstrated that the

direct action tactics of the civil rights movement could be successfully applied to the problem of union organization.

The Charleston campaign was precipitated by the efforts of that city's hospitals to frustrate the organizing activities of the National Organizing Committee of Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Workers. In March 1969, when the Charleston Medical College Hospital sacked a dozen active members of that union, the hospital's mostly black, mostly female work force came out on strike; a week later, their fellow workers at the Charleston County hospital did likewise. The strikers' demands were simple: union recognition, an increased wage and an end to discriminatory hiring and promotion practices. One hundred strikers were soon arrested for violating an anti-picketing injunction.[115]

When Ralph Abernathy and a team of SCLC organizers arrived in early April, they proceeded to fashion a direct action campaign around the strike. Their task was facilitated by the repressive actions of the white authorities, who imposed an early evening curfew and mobilized two battalions of the South Carolina national guard. Angered by such actions, the black community rallied behind the strikers and, between April and July, more than one thousand people went to jail for defying court orders and martial law.[116]

The mass arrests were of inestimable value to the

SCLC. Through the efforts of Andrew Young and Walter Fauntroy (the former touring the nation to publicize the strike, the latter lobbying Congress), an impressive array of individuals and groups were enlisted in support of the strikers. Additional labour support came from the United Auto Workers, whose President, Walter Reuther, marched alongside Coretta King, and Local 1199 of the Textile Workers' Union, which picketed the New York offices of the South Carolina-based J.P. Stephens Corporation. Other groups, including a committee of Charleston clergymen and a bi-partisan group of US Senators, added their voices to those who were calling for a settlement.[117] In July, the hospital workers won union recognition and a thirty cents an hour wage increase.

The successful outcome of the Charleston strike did much to revive the SCLC's flagging spirits. More important, it vindicated its commitment to organizing the working poor. During the following three years, the SCLC supported more than a dozen local strikes, including sanitation workers in Macon, Georgia, and Tallahassee, Florida; and hospital workers in Suffolk, Virginia, Atlanta, Memphis, Birmingham, and Nashville. In addition, the Conference undertook its own organizing drives among bakery workers in Rock Hill, South Carolina, and domestic workers in Daytona, Florida.[118]

The SCLC's attempt to combine "Soul and union power" met with mixed success. Labour organizing was

notoriously difficult in the ten Southern states which had anti-union "right-to-work" laws, and the SCLC's lack of experience in this field further hampered its organizing activities. Nevertheless, the Georgetown, South Carolina, steelworkers' strike demonstrated that, given the right conditions, the Charleston triumph could be repeated.

The strike was triggered by the refusal of a West German company to abide by the result of a NLRB election in which eighty per cent of the workers in its Georgetown factory voted to join the United Steelworkers Association. Requested to intervene by the USWA, Carl Farris, the SCLC's National Coordinator of Labor Organizing Projects, seized upon what he viewed as "a classic opportunity to forge the union of black and white workers." SCLC-organized night marches and mass meetings did, indeed, bring about an unprecedented degree of interracial solidarity among the strikers, thus frustrating the time-honoured strategem of Southern capital of defeating attempts at union organization by setting white worker against black.[119]

The solidarity of the striking work force, the arrest and injury of marching strikers by state troopers, and the attempt by the Welfare Department to cut off food stamps for the strikers' families brought about a notable amount of support from the white community, support that was, perhaps, the decisive factor in winning

a favourable settlement. In addition to such civil rights groups as the NAACP and the American Civil Liberties Union of South Carolina, the strikers were backed by the local Teamsters Union, the state AFL-CIO and white students from the University of South Carolina.[120]

After a four-month struggle, the steel company was ordered by a federal court to negotiate with the USWA; in February 1971, a four-year contract was signed. To Carl Farris, the campaign's strategist, the meaning of the victory was clear. "Few social activists of this day," he wrote, "have experienced a Georgetown situation, that is, black and white workers rallying in a black church in great solidarity with black and white citizens in the community."[121]

The SCLC in the South: "Marching is Never Outdated."

In February 1970, the New York Times reported that "Very little direct action civil rights activity is to be found anywhere in the South today."[122] Wherever such activity was found, however, the SCLC was as likely as not involved. Despite the unfavourable political climate of the Nixon years, King's followers insisted that injustice be exposed, brutality protested and witness made to the Judeo-Christian ideals that were at the heart of the SCLC's philosophy. As Golden Frinks put it: "Marching is never outdated."[123]

Direct action was especially appropriate in areas

that had never been reached by the civil rights movement, where "resistance to change . . . continues to shape and confine the lives of blacks almost as much as change itself." Here, white supremacy was still the unchallenged status quo, schools and public accommodations remained segregated, and demands for integration were met, as they had been nearly a decade earlier, by mass arrests, tear gas, beatings, and slayings. In these counties, which had rarely--if ever--seen a SNCC field secretary or a CORE organizer, the SCLC played an invaluable role in consolidating and extending the gains of the previous years, giving substance to changes that existed only on paper, and mobilizing Southern blacks to protest the frequent outbursts of violence and repression that occurred during the four years following King's assassination.[124]

School desegregation, more specifically, school desegregation plans which resulted in de facto segregation, the closing down of black schools, and the sacking or demotion of black teachers, was a primary focus of SCLC demonstrations in the South. In early 1969, Golden Frinks led a month-long march through North Carolina to protest such a plan in Hyde County; a year later, in Perry County, Georgia, Hosea Williams led school integration demonstrations that resulted in 430 arrests.[125] In Butler, Alabama, the dismissal of three black teachers prompted fifteen weeks of SCLC demonstrations in the summer of 1971. The fatal injury, during a march, of a black woman by a white

motorist led to a sharp escalation of the campaign and, after more than three hundred arrests (including that of Ralph Abernathy) the white authorities of Butler and Choctaw County agreed to the reinstatement of the dismissed teachers, the formation of a bi-racial committee, and the integration of the city government and police force.[126]

In addition to direct action, voter registration and political organization remained an important aspect of the SCLC's work in the South. The Voting Rights Act had made black political power, if not yet a reality, a realistic objective. This was especially true of the Black Belt counties with black majorities, the very areas in which white supremacy had been--and in some places still was--so solidly entrenched and rigidly enforced.

In the summer of 1969, four years after it had first initiated demonstrations there, the SCLC conducted a voter registration campaign in Greene County, Alabama and, in an election conducted under strict federal supervision, blacks gained control of both the county commission and the board of education. This was the first time that blacks had taken over the government of a black-majority county as a direct consequence of the Voting Rights Act.[127]

A similar metamorphosis occurred in Sandersville, Georgia, where demonstrations had begun as late as October 1969. After a bitter two-year struggle which was marked by mass arrests, shootings and attempted bombings,

political power in Washington County decisively shifted when three blacks were elected to the Sandersville city council. In every town that experienced such a struggle, organizations like the SCLC depended upon dedicated local leaders. One such in Sandersville was Richard Turner, whose courage served--as had King's on a larger scale--to overcome the fears of his followers: "Ain't afraid of dying. They're gonna bulljive us, they're gonna lock us up, and they're gonna beat us. . . . But we ain't gonna stop."[128]

War Against Repression

The success of local campaigns such as Greene County and Sandersville highlighted the failure of direct action to achieve new victories at the national level. At a time when the federal government was attempting to slow school desegragation, weaken the Voting Rights Act and encourage the suppression of demonstrations, the SCLC's most urgent task was, as Ralph Abernathy admitted, that of "ensuring that we enforce the laws that exist and keep the rights Americans already have."[129] The 1969 Hunger Marches, the largest of which was organized by Jesse Jackson in Illinois, succeeded only in preventing proposed cuts in welfare benefits but,as Walter Fauntroy wrote, "to 'hold the line' against the forces of reaction . . . is indeed a victory in times like these."[130]

In 1970, a more fundamental issue came to the

fore: the killing of blacks by the police and national guard. Shocked by the Jackson State and Augusta killings, and outraged by the inflammatory statements of the Attorney General and the Vice President, the SCLC sponsored a 110-mile march through Georgia, which culminated in a mass rally in Atlanta. For five days the spirit of Selma was revived, as white liberals such as Edmund Muskie, George McGovern and Leonard Woodcock joined with civil rights leaders Coretta King, Ralph Abernathy, Roy Wilkins, and Whitney Young. The participation of white students was especially notable. As one of them explained, in the wake of the Kent State killings "they can see that they must act against repression that could crush us all."[131]

The Nixon Administration was the common foe of liberal and radical alike; its reactionary policies brought together, in uneasy alliance, civil rights organizations, black nationalists, white radicals, and certain white liberals. Faced with what Bishop Stephen Spottswood termed "the indiscriminate, ruthless slaying of black Americans by police and civilians," the NACCP began to vigorously defend the rights of black radicals, and Walter Fauntroy affirmed that "The goals of the SCLC are the same as those of the Black Panther Party."[132] Opposition to the wars in Vietnam and Cambodia was another platform upon which liberals and radicals of both races could stand together.

The anti-war, anti-Nixon opposition was, however, a poor vehicle for the advancement of black goals. It was an amorphous, disorganized and unstable coalition. Largely bereft of labour support, and viewed with suspicion by most politians, it was sorely lacking in political strength. Moreover, the war had become a national obsession, eclipsing the issues of poverty and racism. The peace movement commanded the energies of the erstwhile supporters of the civil rights movement, and any energy left over was expended on such causes as feminism and the ecology. "The white liberals and the churches have not been conspicuous in the fight for freedom lately," Bishop Spottswood complained in 1970.[133]

The issues which brought radical and liberal together were basically negative ones. Peace and civil liberties were the lowest common denominators of unity; they could not obscure the substantial disunity that lay beneath the surface. The question of black separatism was especially divisive. Amplified and exaggerated by the press, the cry for black separatism confused and alienated white liberals, causing them to withdraw their active support from the civil rights cause. White radicals, for their part, tended to unthinkingly echo the slogans of the separatists. With groups such as CORE advocating a dual school system, the black separatists unwittingly aided the white opponents of integration.[134]

The SCIC was in the forefront of the peace movement,

as it had been since 1967. Its hostility to the Nixon Administration could not, however, disguise its powerlessness to bring about further social change on behalf of blacks and poor people. The Conference appeared to engage in an endless succession of rallies and marches to no great effect. Its "War Against Repression," for example, in the spring of 1971, involved demonstrations in Las Vegas and Washington, DC; marches to the state capitals of Georgia, Florida, Mississippi, Alabama, and North Carolina; and rallies in New York, Boston and Philadelphia.[135] With increasing frequency, Ralph Abernathy attracted criticism for spending too much time as a travelling critic of the Nixon Administration. "Angry rhetoric," Christian Century complained, could not replace "the necessity to plan the strategies and count the costs for the scaling of the battlements so eloquently decried."[136] Moreover, the SCLC's involvement with the peace movement, its alliance with the National Welfare Rights Organization, and its support for such causes as the California grape workers overextended its declining resources and diluted its impact. By taking on too much, the Conference "lost some of its local ties and started to become swallowed up among other national movements."[137]

By 1973, the defeat of George McGovern, the abolition of the draft and the US withdrawal from southeast Asia had destroyed the peace movement and shattered

the hope that radical reforms could be affected by a coalition of women, the young, the poor, and the non-white. A period of turbulent change and vicious reaction had drawn to a close.

CONCLUSION

THE ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT

In the months before his death, King's robust optimism was darkened by a growing sense of disillusionment. In his last book he conceded that the legislation of 1964-5 was not living up to its promise:

> Every civil rights law is still substantially more dishonored than honored. School desegregation is still 90 percent unimplemented across the land; the free exercise of the franchise is the exception rather than the rule in the South; open-occupancy laws theoretically apply to population centers embracing tens of millions, but grim ghettos contradict the fine language of the legislation. 1

But despite his occasional periods of despair, King was convinced that the achievement of the civil rights movement was already profound and historic. To those--even within the SCLC--who argued that the goal of integration had been fundamentally misconceived, King replied that "the line of progress is never straight." Resistance to a goal did not rob the goal of its basic validity; instead of abandoning the goal one should work all the harder for its attainment.[2]

King had other, more specific grounds for optimism. The achievements of the civil rights movement could not be accurately measured by looking at the obvious lack of progress in the North. The Civil Rights Acts, he pointed out, "were specifically designed to change life in the South;" and if one confined one's view to the South, the

impact of that legislation was far from unimpressive.

Firstly, "the movement . . . has profoundly shaken the entire edifice of segregation." The rigid caste system which had shackled blacks for centuries had been shattered. Moreover, the assault on segregation had not been carried out by a benevolent government: it had been undertaken, under the most difficult and dangerous conditions, by blacks themselves:

> In this decade of change the Negro stood up and confronted his oppressor--he faced the bullies and the guns, the dogs and the tear gas, he put himself squarely before the vicious mobs and moved with strength and dignity toward them and decisively defeated them. 3

Secondly, by attacking segregation in the South, the civil rights movement had attacked the very roots of white racism, a process that would eventually transform political life in the South. The emergence of a black electorate in the South would not only send blacks to state legislatures and Congress, it would also liberalise the South's white politicians. Thus in 1966, for the first time, white gubernatorial candidates in Alabama and Georgia had openly appealed for black votes. Although defeated, their candidacies nonetheless anticipated an alliance between blacks and poor whites that would displace the Maddoxes and Wallaces, and eliminate race as a political issue.[4]

The political reform of the South would also radically alter national politics. Black disfranchisement

had given Southern reactionaries, through their domination of Congressional committees, disproportionate power in the national government. In alliance with Northern Republicans, the segregationists had been, since the 1930's, a formidable barrier to social reform. It was on the issue of civil rights that that alliance had been broken in 1964-5. Now, weakened and enfeebled by the growing black vote in the South, the Dixiecrat-Republican alliance would "lose its ability to frustrate measures of social advancement and to impose its perverted definition of democracy on the political thought of the nation."[5]

Finally, the civil rights movement had gone beyond race to raise the issues of poverty and militarism, and had demonstrated that all these forms of oppression were interrelated, and rooted in the basic structure of the American political economy. Nonviolent direct action, by revealing the strength of these evils, had underlined the need for "a radical restructuring of American society."[6]

To what extent have the events of the last decade vindicated King's optimism?

Integration and Education

When Richard Nixon became President, white opposition to school integration was given a new lease of life. Despite the efforts of the federal government, however, desegregated public education is well on the way to becoming a reality.

It was largely due to the federal judiciary that the Nixon Administration's attempt to turn back the civil rights clock failed. When, in the autumn of 1969, the Justice Department requested the Supreme Court to permit an indefinite delay in the desegragation of thirty-three school districts in Mississippi, the Court answered with an unequivocal "No." On October 29, 1969, the Supreme Court decreed that the time had come for the South to "terminate dual school systems at once," and to operate "now and hereafter only unitary schools," even if it involved large-scale busing. "The Court has chosen to override both the State of Mississippi and the Justice Department," complained Senator Strom Thurmond of South Carolina. The implication of the order was nonetheless inescapable. As the Governor of South Carolina put it, "We have run out of time. We have run out of courts."[7]

In January 1970, thirty school districts in Mississippi desegregated; the state's seemingly impregnable wall of segregation was breached, sixteen years after the Supreme Court had ordered integration "with all deliberate speed." Leon Panetta, civil rights director of HEW, believed that the event marked "the beginning of the end."[8] In the year that followed, the proportion of black children in majority white schools jumped from 20 to 35 per cent, an increase greater than that of any previous year. Newsweek termed the white reaction to genuine integration "a perplexing blend of defiant posturing . . . and

calmly reasoned compliance " but, in the perspective of the preceding decade, the prevalence of the latter response was more significant than the survival of the former. When nearly six hundred more school districts were ordered to desegregate for the next school year, the transition was in the most part peaceful and orderly. By 1972, some 46.3 per cent of the South's black children were being educated in predominantly white schools.[9]

The complete integration of Southern schools is, however, hindered by a number of factors. Firstly, many Southern cities are plagued, as are cities in the North and West, by the migration of whites to outlying suburbs. As cities such as Atlanta, Richmond, New Orleans, and Charleston become predominantly black, integration is increasingly difficult to achieve. Secondly, although ordering the eradication of de jure segregation "root and branch," the Supreme Court has not opposed de facto segregation with equal passion. In a recent case, the Court decided that if segregation (or resegregation) has occurred as a result of population shifts ("people randomly moving into, out of and around" a school district), there is no judicial remedy as long as state action is not involved. But, as Stephen Gillers has pointed out, in the context of persisting housing discrimination and economic inequality, "The de jure/de facto distinction can have no meaning except to lawyers." [10]

Thirdly, white opposition to integration, articulated as opposition to busing, continues to inhibit the efforts of all levels of government--including the federal courts--to bring about full integration. Finally, desegregation has resulted in a steep rise in the number of white children in private schools. One tenth of the South's white children attend private, all-white "segregation academies." As the Southern Regional Council reported in 1976, "School desegregation in the South is in the main an unfinished business," and will remain so as long as white racism persists.[11]

Political Participation

Two years after the passage of the Voting Rights Act, the US Commission on Civil Rights reported that "we are still a long way from the goal of full enfranchisement." Despite the addition of over half a million black voters (an increase in black registration from 38 per cent to 62 per cent), the ratio of black voters to the adult black population was only 77 per cent of the white.[12]

Barriers to registration were only one type of device used to dilute black political power. Although vote fraud was no longer widespread, there was ample opportunity to hinder black voters and candidates. Because white officials supervised the entire electoral process, they could omit registered voters from the voting lists,

give false information to black candidates, refuse to help illiterate voters, and locate polling booths in white areas. In addition, filing fees could be increased, electoral districts gerrymandered, elections changed from single-district to at-large, and offices abolished, made appointive or their terms extended.[13]

Seven years later, black political participation had become routine. The attempt of the Nixon Administration to weaken the Voting Rights Act failed and, in a number of significant respects, the Act had been strengthened. Between 1968 and 1972, approximately half a million additional black voters were registered in the seven Southern states covered by the Act. Between 1964 and 1975, the black electorate in the South increased from 2 million to 3.8 million; in the same period, black registration jumped from 19.3 to 65.4 per cent in Alabama, 27.4 to 64.4 in Georgia, and 6.7 to 62.2 in Mississippi. At the time of the 1976 Presidential election, the level of registered black voters as a proportion of the adult black population was only ten per cent below the corresponding white level.[14]

The rise in the number of black elected officials in the South has been even more sharp. Between 1968 and 1976, their number catapulted from 248 to 1,913. In 1968, not a single black from the South sat in the United States Congress; in 1976 there were three. In 1968, there were a mere twenty-three blacks in the

legislatures of the South; Mississippi, Louisiana and Virginia had only one each; Alabama, North Carolina and South Carolina had none. Six years later, there were sixty black legislators in the South, including twenty in Georgia, thirteen in Alabama, thirteen in South Carolina, and eight in Louisiana. In 1976, the number of black legislators had risen to ninety-nine, and the South had more black elected officials than the rest of the nation put together.[15]

The impact of the black vote should not be exaggerated. Firstly, it has been blunted by an increase in white voter registration during the 1960's that far exceeded the corresponding black increase. Then again, while obstacles to black registration have been largely removed, incidents of physical and economic coercion occur with sufficient frequency in Alabama, Mississippi and Louisiana "that the atmosphere of intimidation and fear has not yet cleared."[16] Attempts to dilute the black vote and prevent the election of black candidates are common. The system of at-large elections, for example, has prevented blacks from gaining an equitable share of elected offices in the Georgia cities of Macon, Albany, Augusta, and Savannah; it has largely excluded blacks from county offices in Alabama. The system of multi-member legislative districts has had a similar effect, minimising black representation in the state governments of Mississippi and South Carolina. Only

strict enforcement of the Voting Rights Act, which authorizes the Attorney General to challenge in federal court changes in Southern city, county and state electoral systems, prevents such discriminatory devices from being adopted on a widespread basis.[17]

The most effective remaining obstacle to black political participation is the tenacious survival of white racism. According to a 1975 report of the Civil Rights Commission, "many white voters refuse to vote for black candidates solely because of their race," a fact which prevents the election of blacks in all but districts with black majorities. (The election of Andrew Young was an exception: his Congressional district was only 44 per cent black.)[18] It is still virtually impossible for a black to be elected to office by a statewide vote, and the likelihood of a black United States Senator or Governor is remote. Thus, for all the progress of the last decade, blacks are still grossly underrepresented in Southern politics: although they make up more than a fifth of the South's voting-age population, they hold only 2.3 per cent of the elected offices.[19]

The Effect of Political Participation

During the Selma campaign, Martin Luther King predicted that "If Negroes could vote . . . there would be no more oppressive poverty directed against Negroes, our children would not be crippled by segregated schools,

and the whole community would live together in harmony."[20]

When attempting to register to vote could involve being beaten, jailed and even killed, it was hardly surprising that King should have depicted the benefits of the franchise in such glowing terms. Nevertheless, amid the euphoria that attended the passage of the Voting Rights Act, a number of political scientists warned that even if full registration and an impartial and open electoral system were achieved, conditions of life for blacks would not radically change. Apart from political inexperience, blacks would be handicapped by their minority status in all but 102 Southern counties. Without white support, black representation would be extremely limited. "A good many Negroes in the South," wrote Donald R. Matthews and James W. Prothro, "may finally win the right to vote only to find themselves in a more or less permanent political minority."[21]

It was far from clear, moreover, exactly how the franchise would benefit blacks. Black-controlled county governments would be everywhere hampered by hostile state governments, their local economies were largely white-controlled, and they were usually among the poorest counties in the nation. Under such adverse conditions, James Q. Wilson warned, "the substantive, rather than the psychological consequences of Negro voting in Black Belt counties are not likely to be as great as diehard white resistance might imply."[22] Even when blacks were

able to elect black mayors in large cities, they would find themselves in a similar predicament. In all but two or three major cities, the political machine was obsolete. City government, lacking in patronage, protection and other political resources, was not the avenue of economic and social mobility that had been of such benefit to previous generations of European immigrants. The cities, moreover, were plagued by urban decay, loss of industry, a shrinking tax base, and the polarization between black inner city and white suburb.[23] "The city itself is just not a healthy animal anymore," said Julian Bond. "So we are taking it over at a time when no one wants it. We are seizing on a dead horse."[24]

How has political participation benefitted blacks in the South? The most striking change has been the elimination of overt racism in Southern politics. After examining the campaign speeches of recent Southern governors, Earl Black concluded that the open defense of segregation and white supremacy was a thing of the past.[25] As Coretta King has written, "the racist epithet has been banished from political campaigns. The psyches of blacks are no longer regularly scarred by the public humiliation of campaigns based on openly declared bigotry."[26]

Such a development was not apparent immediately after the Voting Rights Act when, as Hugh D. Graham and Numan V. Bartley put it, "the Maddoxes and the Wallaces rode the votes of an expanded white electorate

to victory."[27] By 1970, however, a new type of Southern white politician had emerged: the open non-segregationist. In 1970, for example, John C. West defeated an arch-segregationist in the contest for governor of South Carolina. While his opponent based his campaign on an appeal to white anti-busing sentiments, West eschewed racial issues, and had not hesitated to address an NAACP testimonial dinner for Roy Wilkins.[28] The same year, in Georgia, Governor Jimmy Carter affirmed in his inaugural address that the era of segregation had ended and, as a symbolic gesture, erected a portrait of Martin Luther King in the state capitol. In Florida, Reuben Askew replaced the racist Claude Kirk, and in Mississippi and Louisiana, vocal white supremacists were succeeded by men who openly repudiated segregation.[29]

The demise of race-baiting is a direct consequence of the increase in the number of black voters. As Earl Black had demonstrated, the black electorate, a fifth of the total in the South, has made it much more difficult for an overt racist to be elected. With the black vote against him, a white segregationist requires between 59 and 72 per cent of the white vote to win. With increased political competition, such large pluralities are extremely rare.[30] As Andrew Young put it:

> It used to be Southern politics was just 'nigger' politics--a question of which candidate could 'outnigger' the other. Then you registered 10% to 16% in the black community, and folks would start saying 'Nigra'. . . . And now that we've got 50%,

/Continued

> 60%, 70% of the black votes registered, everybody's proud to be associated with their black brothers and sisters. 31

A second direct consequence of black political participation is the new respect accorded to the black community. Black organizations are regularly addressed by white politicians, and black activities are reported by the white-owned press. Police brutality has declined. In Lowndes County, Alabama, eight years after the unpunished murders of Jonathan Daniels and Viola Liuzzo, the New York Times reported "the virtual disappearance of random violence against blacks that went unpunished." By 1973, there were some fifty-six elected black law enforcement officials in Alabama, and whites were routinely arrested for violence toward blacks. Where whites retained political control, as they did in most Southern communities, police brutality usually declined in inverse proportion to the black vote. Thanks to the civil rights movement, the likes of P.C. Jenkins who, as Sheriff of Wilcox County from 1939 to 1971 was held in terror by the black population, were almost extinct. "Never, no more will that happen again," vowed Dr John Cashin, head of the National Democratic Party of Alabama. "Blacks are not going to take that anymore."[32]

A look at the communities in which the battles of the SCLC were waged vividly illustrates the legacy of the civil rights movement. In Montgomery, in 1975, four blacks sat on the nine-man city council, one on the five-

member school board, and two in the state legislature.[33] In Birmingham, where blacks make up forty per cent of the total electorate, three of the city's nine councilmen are black, and blacks sit on most city and county boards. School integration became a reality in 1970 (although white migration to the suburbs has reduced the white school population to half the black).[34] In Danville, Virginia, ten years after the SCIC/SNCC-sponsored demonstrations, two of the city's nine councilmen were black (blacks make up one quarter of the total population), and its eighteen public schools had desegregated. Conceding the justice of black demands for integration, ex-Mayor Henry Stinson explained, "Of course, I'm a coward, and didn't feel it was my responsibility to change things."[35]

Change has also come to Selma and the Alabama Black Belt. Shortly after the passage of the Voting Rights Act, the black vote was responsible for the replacement of Sheriff Jim Clark by Wilson Baker. Baker had defended segregation, but freely admitted that if he were black "I'd be doing just what they're doing." He was, said Andrew Young, "a good man sitting on top of a sick system."[36] By 1972, five blacks sat on the ten-member city council and since 1965, Selma had received $17 million of federal grants. Four of the counties around Selma have black sheriffs. One of them, Greene County, has a black-controlled government which, through grants from HEW and

the Office of Economic Opportunity, is slowly coming to grips with its endemic poverty and unemployment.[37]

The Limits of Political Participation

It was not through local government, however, that King and his colleagues believed that blacks could achieve real equality. Black mayors, councilmen and sheriffs were a necessary first step but, as King repeatedly emphasised, "the larger economic problems confronting the Negro community will only be solved by federal programs involving billions of dollars."[38] It was in the sphere of national politics, by means of a liberalization of the Democractic party, that integrationist civil rights leaders hoped to generate such programmes. The superordinate goal of the civil rights movement, said Andrew Young, was "a qualitative structural reform of the Congress which might liberate a good portion of that $80 billion war budget. . . . wipe out poverty here--and make a good start in becoming brothers to the Third World."[39]

This strategy, however, was based upon three assumptions of questionable validity: that blacks and working-class whites in the South would unite in favour of progressive social reform, that the elimination of overt racism from Southern politics would produce white politicians sympathetic to such reform, and that what King termed the "radical restructuring of American society"

could be achieved through the existing political system.

At the time of King's death, blacks in the South were a politically isolated minority. In many respects, they still are. The emergence of a neo-populist alliance between blacks and working-class whites continues to be frustrated by the latter's racism which--as far as such things can be accurately measured--is significantly greater than that of the more affluent, upper-class whites.[40] As Bartley and Graham noted, rather than finding themselves in alliance with working-class whites in the period after 1954, "Black voters increasingly joined with the economically conservative upper-income whites in opposition to racial extremism."[41] The prototype of this kind of alliance was the famous "Atlanta Coalition," in which "the Bourbons and the Negroes have voted together to exclude the rednecks from power;" similar alliances were occasionally responsible for the election of moderate or non-segregationist governors, mayors and Congressmen. Their political potential, however, was extremely limited and, in the resurgence of racism that attended the civil rights movement, Southern politics was largely dominated by white segregationists elected by the votes of working-class whites.[42] In the years after the Voting Rights Act, these whites showed no sign of becoming liberal, integrationist Democrats: they were the foundation of George Wallace's political strength in 1968 and 1972, and continued to demonstrate "a frequent

fondness for segregationist conservatives."[43]

It is the reluctance of the mass of working-class whites to enter into political alliances with blacks that has made the growth of black political power in the South disappointingly slow. Despite the publicity aroused by the election of black sheriffs, there are still only five of them throughout the South, and white domination of county government is still virtually complete. The assertion of Governor George Busbee of Georgia that "the politics of race has gone with the wind" is patently inaccurate.[44]

Even if race were not a factor in Southern politics, economic differences would continue to divide working-class whites from blacks. They strongly oppose the liberal economic measures, such as federally-guaranteed full employment, that blacks overwhelmingly endorse. As in the North, they feel threatened by competition from black workers; "their strongest resentments," wrote Samuel Lubell, "were against paying taxes, particularly for programs designed to help Negroes." The neopopulist assumption that they share the same economic interests as blacks appears to be flawed. No longer can they be described by the blanket term "poor white:" their economic status is significantly higher than that of most blacks. Analyzing the trend of recent Southern politics, Bartley and Graham concluded that "growing differences between blacks and low-status whites . . . offer little

foundation for the resurrection of the alliance of have-nots across color lines."[45]

The decline of political racism since 1970 has given rise to much optimism that blacks will, in the future, derive increasing benefits from political participation. The racial egalitarianism of the South's younger white politicians was graphically illustrated when, in 1975, a majority of Southern Congressmen voted to extend the Voting Rights Act for a further seven years.[46] The abandonment of the defense of segregation does not, however, imply the adoption of support for progressive social reform. Although most whites have come to accept integration, they retain an underlying economic conservatism. The white urban middle-class, which has generally favoured racial "moderates", is averse to even the mildest form of economic populism and, while supporting moderate Democrats in local and state elections, preferred to vote Republican in the Presidential elections of 1968 and 1972.[47] Black participation in politics has not, therefore, made the South markedly more receptive to measures of progressive social and economic reform. It remains the region where "business enjoys the widest permissiveness," where trade unions are weakest (every Southern state has an anti-union "right-to-work" law), and where a disproportionate share of the nation's poverty is located.[48] As Bartley and Graham concluded, the racial moderation of the "New South" did not alter its "continuing

commitment to social conservatism."[49]

The degree of political influence achieved by Southern blacks as a result of the civil rights movement has not had the profound impact on national politics that King, Bayard Rustin and others predicted. Between 1968 and 1972, blacks were doubly isolated as Southern whites deserted the Democratic party for Nixon and Wallace. King's lament that "our political leaders are bereft of influence in the councils of political power" was as true as it had been in 1967.[50]

Even if black political strength were maximated, the feasibility of radical social change would remain doubtful. King and the strategists of the civil rights movement believed that "the contradictions of this society can be resolved by a coalition of progressive forces which becomes the <u>effective</u> political majority in the United States."[51] But if such an alliance came together to elect a President, (and one could argue that Carter's support approximated the kind of coalition King and Rustin envisaged), it would be divided on most important issues by race, class and region. On some issues, such as national health insurance and full employment, blacks will find allies in other minorities and organized labour; on others, such as school integration and affirmative action, they will have to depend on support from the federal judiciary. But, as James Q. Wilson cautioned, the opposition of the white majority to significant

increases in social expenditure makes "the possibility of a stable, organized liberal--to say nothing of radical--coalition . . . slight."[52]

Finally, the proponents of the coalitionist strategy can be criticized for mistaking the appearance of democracy with the reality. Numerous political scientists have demonstrated that "various élites, and especially the corporate élite, exert a disproportionate amount of political power which is not significantly restrained in the way the pluralists suggest."[53] These élites, represented by pressure groups, lobbies and, frequently, directly by politicians, can successfully block progressive social reform. In a Marxist sense, blacks and other racial minorities are America's most progressive political force: their inequality is the contradiction of American capitalism. But, as Herbert Marcuse has argued, the American political economy has succeeded, contrary to Marxist theory, in solving its internal contradictions or, at least, in reducing them to manageable proportions.[54] Despite gaining access to the political system, the economic status of blacks is still largely determined by the same set of economic relationships as before. High unemployment and underemployment among blacks and other minorities act to cushion whites against the effects of recession; black demands for federally-guaranteed full employment are opposed by economically secure whites who fear inflation and higher

taxes. The fact that racial minorities are "last hired and first fired" is determined by the basic structure of the overall economy. Consequently, as Raymond S. Franklin and Solomon Reswick wrote, "Programs and actions by blacks that threaten the basic tenets of capitalism ... are destined to fail as long as the system remains intact."[55] Political participation alone cannot close the economic gap that still separates blacks from white Americans.

Limited progress is possible, nevertheless, within this political economy. Blacks are one voice among many, and a weak one at that, but, allied with liberals and labour, blacks can, under a Democratic Administration, prevent the kind of economic policies which had a disproportionately adverse effect on them between 1969 and 1973. In addition, anti-discrimination laws are slowly eliminating the most blatant forms of economic and educational racism. As a result of the four-fold increase in the number of blacks attending college between 1960 and 1970, the partial lowering of discriminatory barriers to entry into the skilled trades union, and increasing black employment in the public sector, the black/white income difference is narrowing, especially in the younger age groups.[56]

In 1976, the long-delayed political impact of the civil rights movement finally made itself felt in national politics. The election of Jimmy Carter was notable because it could not have come about without the cohesive support

of the newly-enfranchised blacks of the South: black votes provided Carter's margin of victory in every Southern state but Virginia; nationwide, he received less than half of the total white vote. This fact, Andrew Young believes, gives Carter "the capacity to do more to put an end to racism than anybody since Martin Luther King." It would be well to note, however, that black dissapointment with Carter's admittedly brief record in office once again underlines the severely limited influence of black political power.[57]

The Contemporary Relevance of King's Philosophy

If the seeds of social change that were planted by the civil rights movement have flourished, why has nonviolence become a dormant, if not dead, philosophy? Part of the answer is that the discipline of Satyagraha was difficult even for its most dedicated adherents; for most it was a commitment which could not survive in the face of persistent, unrelenting white maltreatment. Moreover, philosophic nonviolence did not, as King believed, eliminate bitterness and hatred: it merely suppressed and disguised it. The rage articulated by the "Black Power" slogan was all the more vehement for having been submerged for so long, for having found no outlet in the emotional asceticism of Satyagraha. King's exaggerated claim that suffering could actually change the heart of the

oppressor raised expectations that were bound to give way to first frustration, and then bitterness.

By tying together the two separate and distinct concepts of philosophic nonviolence and direct action, King was remarkeably successful in creating an ideology which legitimized the tactics of civil disobedience. At the same time, however, this synthesis created an artificial polarity between violence and nonviolence, a false dialectic that was exploited by both the opponents and the advocates of nonviolent direct action. The proponents of Black Power were perfectly clear in their own minds that to reject philosophical nonviolence was not to advocate violence. Most whites, nevertheless, were unable or unwilling to perceive this distinction, and condemned Black Power as a dangerous and irresponsible cry for violence, revolution and black racism. It was a reaction that was exacerbated in its hysteria by the fact that philosophic nonviolence, by disguising the fact that blacks were, after all, seeking power, made Black Power appear much more threatening and radical than it actually was. Black radicals, exasperated by this inability on the part of whites to distinguish philosophic from pragmatic nonviolence, finally abandoned any attempt to persuade or explain; many felt that verbalized threats of violence were the only way to disassociate themselves from King's philosophy of

loving the oppressor. Thus, tragically, in rejecting philosophic nonviolence they not only turned their backs on nonviolent direct action as a tactic, but also found themselves further and further down the dangerous--often fatal--road of separatism and violent revolution.

Nonviolence as a technique of social action has declined largely because its effectiveness has declined. Despite its element of coercion, the efficacy of this technique depended upon the extent to which the white majority supported its demands. King was well aware of this elementary fact, but, as Samuel DuBois Cook has written, he made the error of overestimating the white majority's "active sense of justice . . . will for a new order in race relations, and sense of guilt and shame over the dehumanized role of black people."[58] Above all, as King was increasingly aware after the Chicago campaign, nonviolent direct action had failed to perceive that racism was rooted in the very structure of the American political economy; that although the ideology of liberalism could embrace legal and political equality, it could not accomodate equality of economic opportunity, the elimination of poverty, and the abandonment of neo-colonialism. As witnessed by the failure of the civil rights movement in the North, black demands, expressed through non-violent direct action, for the elimination of economic

deprivation failed to attract significant white support. There is little evidence to suppose that they will do so in the foreseeable future.

Despite, however, the apparent obsolescence of nonviolent direct action, Martin Luther King and the SCLC have left a lasting and relevant legacy. Time has vindicated their basic strategies for social change. Even if divested of its philosophic content, nonviolence remains a pragmatic necessity: as Coretta King has observed, the rhetoric of violence adopted by SNCC, the Black Panthers and other groups "unleashed a vastly superior force which seized the opportunity to intimidate or destroy organizations and individuals," leaving the black community divided, exhausted and apathetic.[59] Separatism has been similarly devoid of achievement: measures demanded by and for blacks alone have failed to make headway. As King repeatedly emphasized, and as Andrew Young continues to insist, coalitions and alliances are dictated by the fact that "There are 50 million white Americans who share the same economically-related problems of blacks today."[60] Thus Black Power can only succeed within the larger context of "Poor People's Power."

The SCLC's stand against the war in Vietnam is important not so much for what it achieved in a tangible sense--the war continued for five years after King's death--but for what it meant, and continues to

mean, as a point of historical reference. Many of those who denounced King's stand later admitted that they, not King, had been in error. In 1967, King's was a lonely and inneffectual voice; a decade later, his critique of American foreign policy is a palpable influence on the diplomacy of the Carter Administration. It was because King proved--not merely said--that what was morally correct was, ultimately, politically wise, that there are so many who believe, with Andrew Young, that "the most important thing for us who were closest to him to do is to keep his work alive."[61]

NOTES

CHAPTER I. THE ORIGINS OF THE SOUTHERN CHRISTIAN LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE AND THE NON-VIOLENT CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT

[1]Martin Luther King, Jr., recorded sermon, September 1966, In Search of Freedom (Chicago: Mercury Records). Martin Luther King, Jr. hereafter referred to as King.

[2]King, Stride Toward Freedom (London: Gollancz, 1958), p. 63. Hereafter cited as STF.

[3]August Meier and Elliot Rudwick, From Plantation to Ghetto (London: Constable, 1970), p. 256.

[4]National Association for the Advancement of colored People, The Year of the Hate Bomb (NY: NAACP, 1951), p. 5; Southern Regional Council, Intimidation, Reprisal and Violence in the South's Racial Crisis (Atlanta: SRC, 1959), p. 15.

[5]Letter from King to Bayard Rustin, September 20, 1956, file VIII, folder 34, King Papers, Boston University. Collection hereafter cited as King Papers.

[6]"Attack on the Conscience," Time, February 18, 1957, p. 14.

[7]STF, p. 32.

[8]Ibid., pp. 33-6.

[9]King, "Our Struggle," Liberation, April 1956, p. 4.

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[47]Black, p. 333; Bartley and Graham, p. 126.

[48]Lubell, p. 142; NYT, February 20, 1977; Gretchen Machlachlan, The Other Twenty Percent: A Statistical Analysis of Poverty in the South (Atlanta: Southern Regional Council, 1974), p. 5.

[49]Bartely and Graham, p. 167.

[50]WWGH, p. 147.

[51]Rustin, "From Protest to Politics," in Littleton and Burger, op. cit., pp. 375-6.

[52]Wilson, op. cit., p. 950.

[53]Franklin and Resnick, op. cit., p. 221.

[54]Herbert Marcuse, One-Dimensional Man (London: Sphere, 1968), pp. 32-57, 200.

[55]Franklin and Resnick, p. 228.

[56]"Blacks--On a New Plateau," Newsweek, October 4, 1976; "Decade of Progress," Time, April 16, 1973; New Orleans States-Item, April 11, 1973.

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[58]Samuel DuBois Cook, "Is Martin Luther King, Jr., Irrelevant?" New South, Spring 1971, p. 4.

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